

Our Love Affair with Food
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Yes, it's true: Americans are obsessed with food. Of course, food in and of itself is not bad. It is clearly a necessity of life. Food is meant to be enjoyed and the food produced by our earth is a gift from God. So just how do we develop unhealthy relationships with food and what can we do about it?

The Land of Plenty

We are constantly inundated with images of food. There are fast food restaurants on every corner. In addition, food has become linked to almost every activity we do. People bring snacks to work. Every party you attend seems to be focused on food. Almost every church and school activity now involves food. Therefore, it is important for us to notice the abundance of food and acknowledge that we are literally surrounded by food.

It Starts Young

It is rare today to see a young child without food in their hands. Any time a child starts to fuss, they are offered snacks. As a mom, I know that hunger can cause major kid meltdowns, but we need to be aware of the message that we send with food. If we are continually offering food to our young children to keep them quiet or to calm them down, what do they learn? Children's relationship to food may be off to the wrong start if they learn young that the only way to soothe themselves or to beat boredom is through food.

Although it takes a bit more effort, soothing a child through touch and sound (stroking their cheek or singing a song) can be helpful. Distraction also works wonders in older babies and younger children. Being prepared with little distractions, rhymes, toys and books can go a long way.

Teens and College Years

Peer pressure can be as unassuming as "Let's go to McDonald's." Going out for food and having social time around food becomes more common at this age. Poor eating habits and the actual cravings teens have for increased calorie intake seems to be a double whammy. Teens and young adults are also extremely busy and many don't have the time or money to eat healthy. Help your teen learn how to make healthy lunches and snacks. Have them involved in planning food menus. Talk with them about eating in the cafeteria and eating regular meals. Discuss budgeting for "fun food" and other expenditures to keep it in perspective.

The Grown-Up Years

Saying no to snacks at work and donuts at church takes a lot of willpower and can often seem overwhelming. Learning how to limit ourselves when we're dining out or sitting in front of the TV or computer is also difficult. There are many types of eating that adults do that lead to

problems with food. People eat because they are bored, stressed, lonely, unaware (like in front of the TV), or in need of comfort. It is true that our bodies indeed crave comfort food to help us lower our stress. However, when food becomes a way to help cope emotionally, it's time to examine your relationship with food.

“Gentle Eating”, by Vivian Lamphear, Steven Arterburn and Mary Ehemann and the companion book “Gentle Eating Workbook”, provides many helpful tips on having a healthy relationship with food.