DEFINING FOOD & COPING WITH DEPRESSION

Dictionary.com defines "food" as "any nourishing substance that is eaten, drunk, and otherwise taken into the body to sustain life, provide energy, promote growth, etc." I was somewhat surprised by this definition, because I've come to see the sustaining substance that is food as so much more than just its dictionary definition, and none of my own definition is seen in any dictionary I've seen. My way of thinking about food is defined as "a sustaining substance that not only is essential for survival, but also is a coping skill, a friend, something that is constant and always there for you, an enemy, a cycle that is hard to break, and a regret." My definition is longer, more in-depth maybe, and can be applied directly to my own life.

To understand my definition of food, you must first understand that my way of thinking about food has a direct correlation to my struggles with depression. I've been depressed since high school, and I've always loved food. It makes me happy, so it makes sense that food is the first thing I turn to when I am feeling depressed. Food provides me with an outlet, a way out for a few minutes. Even if it's not necessarily a healthy habit, and even though it only provides a temporary release, it has worked for me for a long time.

When I first started eating more, the weight gain wasn't a big deal. It was gradual, and sometimes the difference was so small that nobody, including myself, really noticed. A pound here, a pound there, but nothing really substantial. That is, until the pounds started to add up. When I started to see how much weight I was gaining, I felt like I couldn't control it. For me, the release that I got out of enjoying food was worth the weight gain.

Fifty pounds and 3 years later, I still struggle to "put the fork down" and to deal with my feelings appropriately. Now, though, I can see the negative effects that the weight has added to my life. I am very self-conscious about my body, and I usually always wear jeans, and clothes that aren't too tight. I hate wearing bathing suits, and my self-esteem is next to nothing. I feel guilty after eating anything that contains too many calories, and I have a hard time with going out to eat in a restaurant. It's like there is this constant battle going on inside my head. Not only the depression battle (you're not good enough, etc.) but also the battle of whether or not I should eat this or that.

It is difficult, but I am trying to combat both "battles" by trying to eat better, and to exercise more. I want to lose the weight that I've gained, and I know it's going to be a long road ahead of me. But there is no reason why I shouldn't be able to do it. I am still depressed, but I know now that I can't let it swallow me, and I can't feed the fire with food, because the negative impact on both my physical and mental health far outweighs the happiness I feel for a few minutes while consuming sweets. I do slip up sometimes – I'm only human after all. But I'm dealing with my emotions differently than I would have a few years ago.

Before when I felt depressed, I would have eaten ice cream or some other high calorie snack until I was full. More than full, actually. Ready to explode might be a better description. But now, things are different. I still experience those emotions frequently, but now I talk about them. It's hard, really hard, but I've found the talking to work even better than food. I've discovered new outlets to use to help my symptoms, like taking up poetry again, and I've even gone and participated in some poetry slams! I'm happier, losing weight, and generally just in a better place. And that is the most important thing.

AUTHOR

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