

SportsNutrition

Nancy Clark, MS, RD
1300 Boylston St., Brookline, MA 02467

www.nancyclarkrd.com
617-795-1875

The Athlete's Kitchen

"I try to stay away from peanut butter; I end up eating the whole jar." ... "I don't keep cookies in the house." ... "I can't eat just one Hershey's Kiss. It's all or nothing."

All too often, I hear my clients bemoan their battles with food. For them, peanut butter and chocolate are "trouble foods," not one of life's pleasures. Ice cream is also taboo, and fights with food are a daily energy drain.

Because too many fitness exercisers and competitive athletes deem food to be the fattening enemy, SCAN (the Sports and Cardiovascular Nutrition Practice Group of the American Dietetic Assoc.; www.SCANDpg.org) focussed their 2006 conference on ways to help athletes improve their relationships with food and their bodies. Below are just a few tips from sports dietitians and others who help active people transform food fears into peaceful fueling.

Hungry or Bored? When you cannot determine if you want to eat because you are hungry or bored, Dallas eating disorder specialist Jessica Setnick, RD suggests you try the Apple Test. Simply ask yourself "Would I want to eat an apple now?" (or any other food that is boring for you). According to Setnick, if you are hungry enough to eat a boring apple, then you most likely are truly hungry. But if you bypass the apple only to indulge in apple pie, think again. Maybe you are just using food to entertain yourself?

Food or Drug? Why do you want to eat apple pie even when you are not hungry? Setnick suggests the treat diverts your attention away from uncomfortable feelings. Eating something yummy is far more fun than feeling bored, lonely, anxious or unloved. But unfortunately, frequent sessions of overeating to smother feelings with food can easily lead to weight gain. The weight gain then leads to dieting, blowing the diet, gaining more weight, going back on the diet...

While few of us readily share our feelings, our culture does allow us to talk about cookie cravings and pizza "pig outs." While some of these overeating episodes are enjoyable, others can be depressing—a red flag for emotional hunger. If that's your case, be gentle with yourself when your eating feels out of control. Acknowledge your struggles, write in a journal, talk to a friend, get enough sleep.

When you get mad enough at yourself for using food as a drug to smother your feelings, Setnick suggests you think about alternative ways to cope with life's problems. Ask yourself *How would someone without an eating disorder manage this situation?* Normal eaters, who overeat on holidays, at restaurants, etc., don't beat themselves to a pulp by running ten extra miles or starving themselves the next day. They simply feel less hungry and naturally eat less. They trust their bodies to make up for their mistakes in eating.

If you cannot trust your body to regulate food intake, you might benefit from professional help; the referral network at www.eatright.org can help you find a dietitian.

When Food is Foe

To eat or not to eat? When you know you should eat better but cannot manage to do so, a part of you is unwilling to make the required food changes. Perhaps you believe eating more at breakfast will make you fat? Or eating a little peanut butter on a bagel will lead to devouring the whole jar of peanut butter?

According to nutrition therapist Molly Kellogg RD, LCSW of Philadelphia, try making your fear—*If I eat breakfast, I'll end up eating more all day*—into an experiment. Promise yourself you will eat more breakfast for one week (or even just for three days) and observe what happens. At the same time, tell yourself you can always go back to your old ways after having experimented with the new eating plan.

Keep an open mind and observe any benefits that occur as a result of the dietary improvement. That is, if you experiment with eating a bigger breakfast, do you feel better? Are you less hungry all day? More productive? Do you have better workouts? Crave fewer sweets? Eat a smaller dinner followed by less desire to snack? Perhaps you will come to appreciate breakfast as being the most important meal of your sports diet! If the benefits of the new food plan outweigh the past fears of weight gain, you may even lose the desire to revert to your coffee-only breakfast. Give it a try?

Who is the prettiest of them all? When you look at your body in the mirror, do you admire your whole body's beauty? More likely, you just see flaws in your chest, abdomen and thighs. No glamour model here! Advertisements from the "beauty industry" (the businesses that sell make-up, hair coloring, plastic surgery, liposuction, etc.) increase anxiety about how we look—especially as we age. According to Larry Kirkwood, Kansas artist and body image educator, the beauty industry defines women as being sex objects and possessions. The industry's messages are *Be sure you look good every minute of every day so you'll be attractive to men* and *Don't lose your good looks as you age*.

The fear of losing youthful beauty makes many people feel anxious; they might color their hair to look "normal" again, buy cream to hide wrinkles, or starve themselves to be sleek. They easily forget that aging is a normal process and adds a beauty of its own. Kirkwood reminds us *beauty* is not an inherent quality nor a contest; beauty comes from the mind and soul. If you are struggling with your body image, you can learn skills to help you feel better about yourself regardless of your perceived "flaws" at www.about-face.org and www.AdiosBarbie.com.

Sports dietitian Nancy Clark, MS, RD counsels both casual exercisers and competitive athletes at her private practice at Healthworks in Chestnut Hill, MA (617-383-6100). Her popular *Sports Nutrition Guidebook*, *Food Guide for Marathoners* and *Cyclist's Food Guide* all offer information to help active people eat well and find peace with food. The books are available via www.nancyclarkrd.com.

