5 Reasons You Are Overeating

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You may have recently put on a few pounds and are not sure why. Or, perhaps you've been working out diligently, but still can't get rid of those pesky love handles. You may, in fact, need to start paying closer attention to your eating habits.

Many men overeat and don't even realize it; in fact, eating is often tied into so many other activities that it's hard to pinpoint when overeating takes place. However, if you tend to absentmindedly munch on chips while watching TV, gorge on buttered popcorn at the movies (even though you've already eaten dinner) or accept a second helping of mom's meatloaf even though you're stuffed, you may be consuming larger portions and eating more often than you need to.

To discover if you're eating enough for a man three times your size, you need to examine your eating patterns to determine how often you really are eating, and — more importantly — why you're overeating. Overeating is most often a symptom of an underlying problem, not the cause.

Once you realize why you're overeating, you can deal with the real issue behind your eating habits and be on your way to a healthier lifestyle.

What Is Overeating?

Before you can determine if you're overeating, you need to make sure that your eating habits are not indicative of a more serious health issue. Compulsive overeating is an eating disorder, like anorexia (starving yourself) or bulimia (binge eating, then purging), and can lead to serious health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Compulsive overeating is often followed by feelings of guilt and depression, and compulsive overeaters often eat alone to avoid letting others know how much they binge on food. Overeating is also not the same as eating more protein to gain muscle mass. Overeating simply involves eating too much, inhaling your food at warp speed or eating when you're not hungry. Since men typically have bigger appetites than women, overeating often goes unnoticed in men, and is not seen as a problem.

Although overeating in men is less severe than an eating disorder, it is still unhealthy and can be a symptom of a problem in another aspect of your life. There are many different reasons why men overeat. To better understand if you are, in fact, overeating, you need to be aware of the different catalysts that may spark unhealthy and unnecessary food consumption.

1. Boredom (aka "couch potato syndrome")

You may overeat because there's nothing better to do. Think about it: All of your buddies are busy with their girlfriends and the only thing worth watching on TV is the Discovery Channel special on bats — and you've already seen it, twice. But, hey, it'll be a lot more interesting if you watch it while eating a bag of chips, right?

Many men also eat just for the sake of eating, even when the TV isn't on. Eating is a visceral, sensory activity, and charges up the senses — which is why eating is often seen as a form of entertainment in and of itself. Sure, it might be fun, but it's not the kind of hobby that will help your golf game or make you a more engaging conversationalist.

2. Stress & Anxiety

It doesn't matter where the stress or emotional tension comes from (work, family, school, etc.), everyone needs to deal with daily frustrations in some way. So, you're not a nail-biter. And there's no way you're going to pull any hair out of your head after seeing uncle Joe go bald at 22.

So what do you do when you're stressed? Eat. Emotional eating may sound like a problem more often experienced by women, but some men deal with emotional upheaval by overeating as well. Whether it's due to stress, courtesy of

your unbelievably demanding boss, or anxiety over a breakup, when life becomes stressful, many men overeat to sublimate frustrations.

Eating gives people a feeling of control and power, and the sensory experience of taste and the comfort of a full stomach may act as distractions from the problems you want to avoid.

3. Quitting an Addiction

You've finally decided that lung or liver cancer isn't for you. That's great, except that you find yourself eating all of the time to curb the urge to grab a cancer stick or have a drink. When trying to give up an oral addiction, many people feel the need to keep their hands busy, and eating seems like a harmless way to keep yourself away from the addictive substances. While overeating may seem like the lesser of the two evils, there are more productive (and healthier) ways to keep your hands busy.

4. Culture & Social Norms

Some cultures heavily emphasize eating large, drawn out, extravagant meals (ever seen "My Big Fat Greek Wedding?"), thus, for many men, having second, third or even fourth helpings is the norm — and even a sign of respect for the cook. In many cultures eating is also all tangled up in all kinds of social events in such a way that the event isn't fully entertaining unless food is involved. It just seems natural to eat popcorn at the movies, or munch on pretzels and peanuts while having a beer after work, or graze on finger foods at parties. Men also tend to eat while watching sports in many cultures.

Unfortunately, the kinds of foods that accompany sporting events usually aren't of the celery and carrot stick variety, and tend to promote weight gain. North American cultures in particular emphasize snack foods and eating between meals, and most often these snacks are high in fat and sodium, and provide very little nutritional value.

Finally, some cultures emphasize the ideal man as big and strong, and don't put pressure on men to stay slim and watch what they eat. As a result, many men are less concerned than women with what — or how much — they eat.

5. To Please Women

For many men, this starts off as trying to please their mom, and show her that they enjoy her cooking. Guys are often urged to take a second helping, and many do, just to avoid insulting the chef.

When it comes to their own relationships, many men want to please the women who cook for them by eating very heartily, so the women in question won't feel that their efforts have gone unappreciated. And this is why so many newly married men quickly put on the pounds. Believe me, she'd rather just hear that the meal's good.