

I Lost My Mother to Food Addiction & Obesity, but You Don't Have To - Four Ways to Control the Urge to Overeat

By Dr. Kirsten Grant, PhD

I remember my mother going to the refrigerator to prepare breakfast on one of many Saturday mornings, pulling out a pack of bacon, cooking the entire package, and then eating all of its contents. She would then eat a whole can of prepackaged biscuits, several scrambled eggs, and drink half a carton of orange juice. At the time, I didn't think that there was anything to be concerned about. I just knew that my mom had experienced a hard week at work and that she was treating herself. She would tell me that she needed to sit down and finally enjoy her food — for once. As the years went on, I would go to the refrigerator to grab a bite to eat and find that my entrée had disappeared. When I asked my mother what happened, she would share with me that she ate my food. *“Why? You don't even like Greek pasta salad?”* I asked. She said, *“I don't like it — but it was there, so I ate it.”* I'll never forget that moment. Not because my mom had eaten the Greek pasta salad that I made — but because she ate ALL of something that she didn't even enjoy. At that moment, I began to question — why would you eat something — if you didn't want it or even enjoy it?

Over the years, my mother's weight would go up and go down. She was always a “thick thighs save lives” kind of size woman — never “skinny” — always “full-figured.” Once, my mother lost almost 60 pounds while going to a weight loss center, but the weight loss center closed, and after several marriages and divorces — the weight returned — and brought almost 50 more pounds of “friends” with it. My mother was intelligent and dedicated to her job. She tried her best to be a good wife and mother, yet, she couldn't seem to find her missing piece to her puzzle. Perhaps you can relate?

My mother died in her sleep in 2016. By the time my mother passed away, she had grown so large that our family couldn't find a normal size casket to bury her in. I was afraid that we weren't going to be able to have the funeral. While carrying my mother's casket to her grave, the pallbearers almost dropped her

because of her immense size. After some time passed, I brought myself to look at my mother's items, and I found three dresser drawers filled with diet books, magazine articles, and newspaper clippings going as far back as the early 1970s. I then realized that losing weight and getting healthier had nothing to do with a lack of information. It had nothing to do with willpower. There was a missing piece to this puzzle — and I was determined to find it.

At that time, I was pursuing two doctorate degrees. The first doctorate was in Health Psychology. The second doctorate was in Clinical Holistic Nutrition. I decided to research and find everything that I could about the mind and WHY women lose weight — and why they gain it back. Also, why do they lose the weight and succeed at keeping it off? What I found surprised me. I found two things: First, I found that researchers discovered that plus size women had a higher chance of being addicted to food or suffer from food addiction symptoms such as overeating, food binges, food cravings, and emotional eating than their normal-weight counterparts. Second, I found scientific studies that showed that the brains of some plus-sized women are more vulnerable to the effects of certain food additives. Two food additives in particular — high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) and monosodium glutamate (MSG). Researchers have found that high fructose corn syrup reduces the brain's ability to detect the chemical signals that tell it "I'm full." For monosodium glutamate (also known as MSG), researchers have found that MSG is an excitotoxin. An excitotoxin literally excites brain cells to death. It causes the person eating the food that contains the excitotoxin to overeat because it takes more and more food to help the brain register as feeling satisfied. Scientific studies have shown that plus size women are more vulnerable to the effects of these food additives than their normal-weight counterparts. In brain scans, researchers have discovered that the brains of food addicted women actually "light up" in the same areas as the brains of a drug addict when given sugar and food additives.

Now that we know why we are eating more of certain foods — how do we control the urge to overeat? First: Identify your "emotional triggers." Aside from food additives, often, women create emotional bonds with certain foods as coping mechanisms. The food provides the "silent promise" to soothe, relax, and provide pleasure to the brain — often pleasure that has been missing in our own lives for some reason. Identify the emotional trigger. What are you feeling? Disrespected?

Unheard? Unloved? Lonely? Stressed? How long have you been feeling this way? Ask yourself and get to know your “tipping point” so that you can “get ahead” of the emotion before you are triggered. Second: Identify and remove sources of HFCS and MSG in your home and prepackaged meals in increments. HFCS is often hidden in ketchup, BBQ sauce, soups, salad dressings, cookies, cakes, pies, and ice cream. MSG is often hidden in chips, prepackaged dinners, frozen dinners, soups, salad dressings, and prepared sauces. Third: Utilize tools to help reprogram the brain to reduce the appeal of these foods and the “chain reaction” emotions that make these foods appealing. Popular psychological tools include, but are not limited to hypnotherapy, social cognitive theory (SCT), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), emotional freedom technique (EFT), hypnotherapy, and neurolinguistics programming (NLP). Fourth: Find tasty alternatives without MSG and HFCS.

You see, I didn't know that my mother suffered from food addiction. Food addiction is still a relatively new research area compared to the traditionally and recently disproven “calories in, calories out” theory. I also didn't know how to help my mother at that time. Because of losing my mother and the struggles I witnessed, I've dedicated my life to helping women who struggle with obesity, weight loss, healthier eating, food addiction, and symptoms such as overeating, food bingeing, food cravings, and emotional eating. I've dedicated my life to helping women (and some brave men) find the missing piece to their puzzle so that they can stop dieting. Stop starving themselves and ultimately stopping the cycle that often spans for generations if left unaddressed. Step by step, with the right tools, love, and support, I work tirelessly to help anyone that truly desires to find their right path.