

# Emotional Eating

## Response to the article “Are you carrying emotional fat” by Helen Foster in issue 37 of "Grazia" magazine

I've read recently an article in your magazine in which I am quoted saying “If you spend all your time worrying what is wrong with your body, you do not have time to worry what's wrong with your relationship”. It is not exactly what I said, and the whole article is not necessary where I would like to be quoted. The article narrows emotional eating to the emotions arising in relationships. This is a bit dangerous approach, because it again swaps under the carpet the real issues and reasons for emotional eating.

Emotional eating (or comfort eating), or e-fat as Helen calls it is caused by any emotions and feelings which are difficult to face. It does not necessary apply to the emotions caused by relationship. In fact, very often emotions and difficulties in relationships are secondary issues and they have deeper roots. There are lots of emotions which could be the source of emotional eating. Most common are feeling lonely, feeling not good enough, guilt, anger, frustration, being overstressed at work, all kinds of anxiety, insecurity and fears, especially fear of death with all its forms, like obsession about health, somebody in the family very ill. The other very common fear is fear of rejection. We usually carry these fears as traits of our personality from childhood or from teenage years, but they can form at any time, especially when we are exposed to some traumatic events.

And yes, it is easier to worry about the body, be obsessed with food and dieting, and keep going through the cycles of stuffing ourselves quickly with food to feel the temporary relief, and then discomfort of being too full and guilt of eating too much. It keeps us occupied and protects us from other emotions and fears, which seem too difficult not only to deal with, but even to acknowledge. This is the natural defence mechanism; some people overeat to cope and others cope differently, they may drink, smoke, they can even slip into physical illness. Our culture is very focused on the body, on looking slim so it favours the obsession with dieting and eating. The vicious cycle forms; we could start eating emotionally because we felt not good enough, but now we feel even worse because we do not look good.

I've been helping hundreds of people with emotional eating issues, and not two cases were the same. Troubled relationship could be the reason of emotional eating, especially when the partner is violent, abusive or jealous. But very often the causes are deeper; it is our insecurity and fears we carry within ourselves. In relationship we became vulnerable, emotional intimacy is difficult. When we do not feel good enough, then what if other person finds out that we are not that good? If we do not love ourselves, then how can we trust that our partner loves us? Sometimes it seems that the fear of real love is the deepest fear ever, it is almost like fear of death, because with the real love “me” and “you” disappears and becomes “us”. And funny thing, it seems to be culture too, because we are even afraid of the word “love”, we say “relationship” instead...

Emotional eating can be caused by troubles in relationship, and it can be caused by the troubles with physical intimacy. It can be also the other way; troubles in intimacy are caused by the emotional eating, obsession with body and look, because when we hate our body, how we can enjoy sex? If we are feeling insecure, if we are obsessed with the need of having perfect body, we feel exposed during physical intimacy, and anything partner does or says is very easily interpreted as forms of rejection. We also tend to ignore our partners when they say compliments, because we do not believe them. Vicious cycle again.

When we leave the relationship, all those insecurities shift. Sometimes. And sometimes could be the opposite. We may be feeling lonely and eat to overcome the lonely, worthless feeling. It could be grief over lost love, we feel lost and worthless, and we eat to compensate. And sometimes we are furious for being used and dumped, so there is even more eating. There is nothing wrong with leaving the relationship when it does not work. When there is violence or abuse it is really empowering to leave. But do we need to close our heart forever?

**The point is that emotional eating is the eating caused by difficult emotions from all sorts of situations. To deal with emotional eating we need to have the courage to face those emotions and to solve them, and it means mostly to change the way we perceive ourselves and others. We cannot change the facts, we cannot change others, but we can change the way we interpret them and react to them, and this is the real freedom. This way we do not need to run away form the situations, including relationships. We have one mind, one body and one life, to enjoy and to be happy in every situation. It works better when we have the courage to open our heart and to look inside.**