

Why does dieting feel like deprivation?

by Linda Fiveson

When the time comes to go on a diet, many people express the same concern; they don't want to feel deprived. There is a common misconception that in order to lose weight we have to restrict our diet so much that we won't be able to comply with it. The dictionary says that being deprived means "lacking in things necessary for comfort, happiness and social satisfaction; not having the basic necessities of life." For many of us, diets mean we will have to give up something we enjoy, namely our favorite foods.

In a perfect world people can eat one thing without guilt, conversation, or trading another food off in order to have the "guilty pleasure." Pleasure? What is truly pleasure? Is it denying yourself that "one thing" on your plate or what you gain when you don't have it?

We can spend endless amounts of time enumerating and listing the foods that are not "on the plan" but what about making a list enumerating how different our lives are when we are eating healthy? I mean a real list on paper; a great reference for when we feel a little weak and want to go back to "non-deprived" eating.

Do the words "I'm not allowed to eat that" make you feel like a victim? And, if you do eat something you feel guilty about, do you then become the judge reprimanding yourself as to why you actually ate it? To add insult to injury, do you also become the jury and punish yourself endlessly to make up for this "terrible offense"? It's like being in a constant mental courthouse!

Your mind might now be raging with chaotic thoughts of how to break free of the trapped and controlled feeling you are stuck in "again" or whether it is possible to break free at all. We all have an inventory of programmed voices, beliefs, and emotions about food and dieting in our minds and that can all be so consuming. Although one part of our mind makes the decision to follow a diet and another reacts as if is being deprived, I think basic human nature doesn't like to be told what to do. We all have a rebel in our nature that instinctively wants to break the rules. These are rules that WE imposed upon ourselves so it's easy to break them; we are not going to get fined or go to jail if we don't obey. It doesn't feel good to be confined by these artificial rules. Another situation that is often hard is eating with other people. Many of them can eat what they want and right away we start thinking, "It's not fair..." And so, the matter is made worse.

We all have a genuine desire to feel and look healthy and fit but this desire gets corrupted by those distorting voices in the mind, the voices that feel deprived. I've always believed that a good time to keep a journal is when our minds are feeling powerful over our eating. I suggest writing down what you think is making it so easy for you to eat healthy at this time. This might help you identify those self-sabotaging thoughts and behaviors. The brain and body should have a positive relationship. You have to put your mind on a diet and your body will follow the lead. When they are in sync, our minds are very happy!

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