

+FOUR COMPONENTS TO HEALTH: HOW ARE YOU DOING?

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After working with thousands of patients, we have discovered that there are usually many combined biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors that lead to problem behaviors, including chronic overeating and addiction (and in my opinion, *chronic overeating is an addiction problem*).

In order to change any unwanted behaviors, you must address all four pillars. You must look at the underlying **biology** of the problems, as well as your **psychology** or mind set, the **social** situation you find yourself in, and your **spiritual** beliefs. If you miss any of them, you will not be able to heal effectively.

BIOLOGY

As far as biology, we need to look at brain function, genetics, family history, physical health (know your numbers!), and dietary issues underlying any problems.

Brain injuries: After looking at more than 60,000 brain scans, it has become clear to me that even mild physical trauma can damage the brain and increase your risk for mental health problems, alcoholism, drug abuse, and eating disorders.

Family history: Having a family history of obesity, mental health problems, alcoholism, or other issues increases your risk.

Mental health problems: Having mental health issues, which are actually brain disorders, such as ADD, depression, bipolar disorder, or anxiety disorders, can fuel overeating and addiction.

Dementia: Dementia has been linked to an increased risk for compulsive behaviors and addiction.

Exposure to environmental toxins: Common environmental toxins, such as mold, insecticides, tobacco smoke, paint, and phthalates (found in thousands of plastic products), pose a risk to brain function and increase the incidence of brain disorders that can look like ADD.

Food allergies: Having allergies or sensitivities to certain foods or food additives can alter the way your brain functions and lead to physical, emotional, behavioral, and learning problems. Headaches or migraines, joint pain, chronic sinus problems, gastrointestinal issues, sleep problems, lack of concentration, anxiety, aggression, and violence are just some of the symptoms associated with food sensitivities and allergies. Plus, food allergies and sensitivities can make you crave the very foods you are allergic to.

Medications: Some medications have side effects that can interfere with your health goals.

Sleep: Getting less than six hours of sleep a night has been associated with lower overall brain activity, which can affect your judgment, thinking, and self-control.

Exercise: Lack of physical exercise negatively affects blood flow in the body, and subsequently to the brain. Low blood flow equals low activity, which equals lowered self-control.

Poor nutrition: Eating a diet high in fat and sugar and low in nutrients can lead to a host of other problems.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL

From a **psychological** standpoint it is important to look at how you are shaped by your thinking patterns and past experiences. Negative psychological factors may drive you to seek solace in unhealthy substances or behaviors. Some of the many psychological issues at play include the following.

Negative thinking: After treating thousands of patients, we have realized that negative thinking patterns can crush your efforts to change your habits.

Past emotional trauma: In order to change any unwanted behaviors, you must deal with any past emotional issues.

Upbringing: Being raised in a chaotic environment without a lot of affection and nurturing damages your psychological well-being. These early hurts can be long-lasting and can influence your behavior into adulthood.

Self-image and outlook on life: People with a negative self-image are far more inclined to engage in unhealthy behaviors.

Past successes and failures: People who see their lives as littered with perceived failures have a tendency to use food, alcohol, drugs, or other behaviors to deal with this negative view. Focusing on your successes—at school, in relationships, in sports, or at work—can mitigate any failures and help keep you from feeling the need to overindulge.

Readiness to change: Ask yourself how ready you are to change. Have you accepted that you have a problem, or are you still in denial? Do you understand what you need to do in order to change, or do you need help learning what to do? Are you highly motivated to change, or do you need other people to keep you motivated to stay on the right track? Be honest with yourself.

SOCIAL

From a social perspective we will look at the current stresses in your life from family, relationships, work, and finances.

Relationships: Your relationships with your parents, grandparents, siblings, children, significant other, friends, and coworkers are so important to your health and well-being. In today's mobile society, however, it can be difficult to develop meaningful relationships. Many people move away from their hometown to find work, commute long hours from home to work, or move around a lot, making it harder to forge lasting friendships and strong family ties. The high rate of divorce in our society also splits up families and abruptly severs friendships.

A lack of social connections causes negative changes in the brain that can lead to trouble in your life. The quality of the relationships in your life is just as important as the quantity.

Work and school: Mean bosses, rude customers, backstabbing coworkers—the people at work can make your life miserable. Having a demanding workload or performing a job you hate can also add to the stress in your life. Similarly, problems with classmates or teachers at school can cause problems with self-image and confidence. Trying to "do it all" at work, at school, at home, at church, and in your relationships can sap your energy and leave you feeling frazzled.

Finances: Financial problems can be a tremendous source of stress, and many people blame money woes for their problems. Often, people suffering from economic hardships turn to food, other substances, or unhealthy behaviors that temporarily help them forget their troubles.

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Thrilling behavior: I also ask my patients about their daily habits and participation in thrilling behaviors that might be altering their brain chemistry. Are you constantly texting or checking your Facebook page? Do you play a lot of video games, watch a lot of TV, or spend a lot of time on your computer? Taking stock of your social situation can help you navigate your journey to better health.

Joining a small group can be very beneficial to your social health.

SPIRITUAL

From a **spiritual** standpoint, it is critical to look at your relationship with God and what your life means and if you have a sense of purpose or a connection to something greater than yourself. Spiritual factors also tie in to your core values and sense of morality—what is right and wrong in your eyes. If you don't feel like your life matters, you are less inclined to take good care of yourself.