

Becoming a beautiful loser in a food society

The idea is to make eating a "pure experience"



The evening that begins with "I bet you can't eat one" often concludes with "I can't believe I ate the whole thing."

By BILL GLADSTONE

Every Tuesday lunch hour, a group of people from every corner of the York campus gather in a room in the Behavioural Sciences building for a special class. Be they students or York faculty, majoring in economics or lecturing in humanities, what brings these people together for this hour is the fact that each has anywhere from five to fifty pounds to lose, and each wants to do something about it.

These people, with the help of the weight control programme offered by the Counselling and Development Centre, hope to lose whatever extra pounds they have, and learn how to keep that weight off permanently.

SECORD OR SANDERS

A person may be overweight because he quite simply has a soft spot for Laura Secord or Colonel Sanders. Or his obesity may be rooted in a deep psychological problem. But in either case, he has a series of bad eating habits that must be overcome if he is to lose weight.

"A person must learn proper food habits to lose weight," says Eva Pila, who runs the weight control programme. "A fundamental part of this is in un-learning all the old eating habits that made a person overweight in the first place."

"Un-learning" the bad habits that have become almost automatic in a person is no simple task. To do this, a person must first be aware of all the habits he has developed that have ultimately been responsible for whatever extra pounds he is carrying.

For some, television is the downfall. They invariably end up in front of the TV each night with several bowls of delicious accessories. As a consequence, the evening that starts with "bet you can't eat one" all too often concludes with a sorrowful "I can't believe I ate the whole thing."

EVERY MORSEL

Others suffers the Reader's Digest syndrome — reading magazines or newspapers at the kitchen table while only partially aware that they are systematically polishing off every morsel of food in the house. (Often, reading then becomes a subconscious excuse and justification for overeating.)

For others, the situation is not so extreme: regularly taking double servings of desert, an unnatural love of potato chips, having a parent (or spouse) who

uses the irrefutable illogic that there are people starving in China, and that to somehow alleviate their situation, you must have third helpings of everything.

The weight control programme stresses that these habits and circumstances can usually be changed by some sort of behaviour modification. "The idea is to make eating a pure experience," says Pila. "The associations eating has with other activities must be broken."

CONFINED TO KITCHEN

Therefore, she suggests that eating should be confined to the kitchen, rather than a chair in front of the TV or anywhere else in the house. And the kitchen should not be used for any activity but the consumption of food, thereby making it impossible to eat and read simultaneously.

Other situations can also be avoided. If you excuse yourself from the table before desert, you'll save yourself from even a first helping. If you keep potato chips out of the house, you'll be less likely to think of them.

"A very real problem is learning how to say no," says Pila. A dieter's family can eventually learn not to force food upon him: a person's will-power has been known to deteriorate when he is fighting off a custard pie offered him by a friend or relative.

Sometimes the best way to handle such a situation, if all else seems futile, is for the dieter to immediately announce that he is allergic to custard, or (in an emergency) has a bowel infection and can't eat it. Then perhaps the insistent friend will remove the tempting but forbidden delight.

WOULD-BE THIN

The weight control programme also provides assistance to the would-be thin person in other areas. The programme offers tips for getting out of a supermarket without buying a half-dozen glazed doughnuts. An exercise that the group has done is to study restaurant menus in class. The point is that a dieter can change his behaviour when he is involved in a situation which could present a problem.

"We live in a food society," says Pila. "It's often hard in a restaurant to get a meal that isn't fried in butter or smothered in high calorie gravy." The dieters are taught to spot the low calorie dishes on a menu. If they can know beforehand that they will be ordering a chef salad and tuna plate, they will be less likely to

give in to the more sumptuous-looking beef wellington and scalloped potatoes on the menu.

FOOD SOCIETY

That we live in a society that is food-oriented is only too evident to anyone trying to lose weight. The stimuli are everywhere. Pictures of hot-dogs in bowling alleys. Television commercials. Magazine ads. Enormous billboard chocolate bars.

And it is no accident that a Harvey's or a Kentucky Fried Chicken can be smelled a block away.

These external cues remind the dieter, who might otherwise have forgotten, that he has not eaten for a few hours. What happens is that he winds up responding to these external cues, instead of to his actual hunger, which should obviously be the only reason he should have for eating.

PAVLOVIAN REACTION

When the Tony's Snack Truck honks, it signals a Pavlovian reaction. The trick is to be short of change, or else to have a battery of celery and carrots at the ready, to fight off the inevitable flow of gastric juices.

Pila is aware that a diet based only the paradigm of behaviour modification is not enough. "We realize that besides being prompted by external cues, people obviously overeat for internal reasons as well," she explains. The programme therefore also deals with internal moods which may bring an individual to overeat.

VICIOUS CIRCLE

If a person over-eats because he has some other deeper problem, he very soon has not only the initial problem, but also the not inconsiderable problem of being obese in a society where thin is in. If the depression or unhappiness behind a person's overeating can be relieved without turning to food, the vicious circle can be broken. Then, besides losing weight, the person can deal with his other problems in a more positive way.

Losing weight is no easy matter. Food can be as addictive as drugs or alcohol, and while you can go

cold turkey with the last two, you cannot cut yourself off from food completely. The temptations will always be around, by necessity, every single day.

The weight control programme stresses that people are human and capable of falling to these temptations. If a person loses his will-power in a weak moment and gorges himself with cheesies, too much guilt about it afterwards can be destructive. The idea is to be compassionate toward oneself, and to be realistic in one's expectations.

DON'T GIVE UP

If you do blow it one day, don't call yourself a failure and give up. Admit to yourself that you're not perfect, and that every beautiful loser has lost control somewhere along the line. Losing momentary control over food is inevitable: the point is to learn from your mistakes, and not make them an excuse for reverting to the old habits.

Of course, the diet also stresses nutrition. The same meal plan, ostensibly with larger servings, can be used by anyone. And if a non-fat person can cultivate proper eating habits now, he can be assured that, besides doing wonders for his general health and well-being, he will probably never grow a belly.

Although the programme is full right now, there will be a new session starting in January. To join, contact Eva Pila at 667-2305, or drop in to Rm. 145, Behavioural Sciences Building.

If your family and friends want to "see less of you", then joining might not be a bad idea.

Penthouse magazine is... Banned!

By IAN MULGREW

The December issue of Penthouse magazine was removed from Oasis and the York Bookstore shelves last Friday because it contained offensive pornography.

Penthouse magazine was banned by United Cigar Stores Co. Ltd, of which Oasis is a franchise operation, "because it is against the company's policy to carry magazines with this type of content," said a UCS spokesman.

Oasis manageress Joan Hill said that other magazines of similar content should also be removed from the shelves.

"I don't know why they don't pull all of the dirty magazines they carry off the shelves," she said. "Why pick only on this one?"

Oasis also carries Playboy, Penthouse Forum, Playgirl, Viva, Playgirl's Men, Love Games, Oui, Men Only, Swank, For Men Only, Elite, Genesis, Gallery, Penthouse Games Book, Foxy Lady, Cavalier, Marriage Forum and Mayfair.

Even though Hill received less than her usual quota of Penthouse copies, she was unable to sell many before the order came through to remove them from the shelves.

"I received only 95 copies instead of the usual 200 for each month," she said.

The controversial issue contained exotic frontal and public shots including pictures of explicit lesbian and heterosexual loveplay.

Although no longer available at York, the magazine apparently can still be bought in Metro Toronto.

Peter Hsu photo



Penthouse magazine's Christmas issue went the way of all flesh. This copy, secured by Excalibur before the ban took effect, was quickly tucked away in the Editor-in-Chief's desk.