

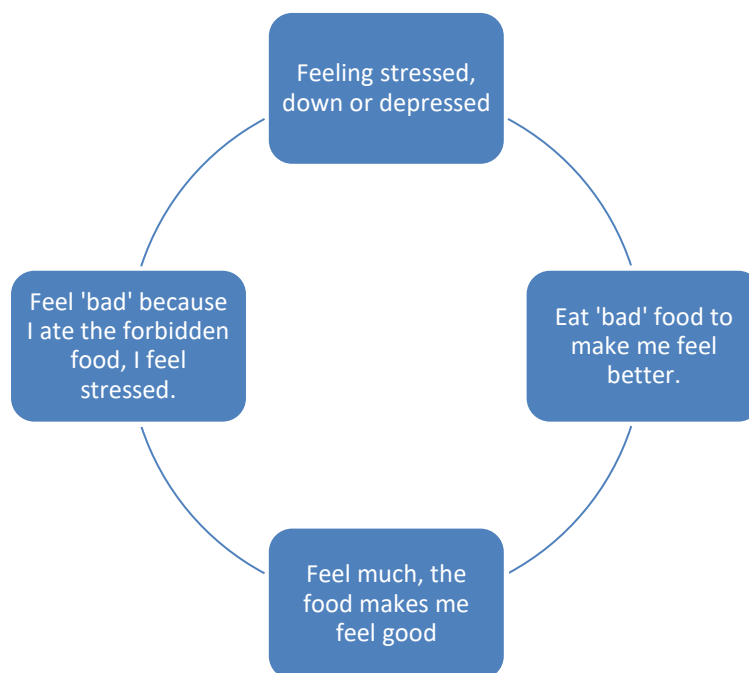
## Don't Eat That!

What if I told you could eat carbs? That's right, bread, pasta, rice and potatoes, all the foods shunned by most mainstream diets or eating fads. The anti-carbohydrate movement has had a huge impact on food consumption behaviours over the years for many people. The marketing and hype surrounding the anti-carbohydrate movement is generally based on unfounded evidence and is simply trying to blame specific nutrients on weight gain and disease development.

Peoples eating behaviours are now judged based on the number of super foods (whatever they are?) it contains and the lack of carbohydrates they eat. If you happen to be eating any of the forbidden carbohydrate foods, then watch out, you will be shamed for your terrible eating patterns.

The whole concept of food shaming extends beyond specific nutrients, like carbs. Food shaming also extends into the realm of treat foods like ice cream, chocolate, sweet biscuits (Tim Tam anyone?) and confectionery. These foods, for some people, may be consumed during times of stress or discomfort and seem to help people manage their stress.

Unfortunately, the shaming of foods appears to create a negative image in people's minds towards these foods and as a result they are labelled as 'bad' or 'guilt' foods. The unfortunate outcome of this labelling is the development of a negative association towards these foods which can result in what I call 'The Vicious Cycle of Food Shaming.'



This is how it usually goes: you've had a crap day at work. Your workload is through the roof and you haven't been to the gym all week. You are feeling tired, stressed and a little emotional due to factors that you can't control. You make it to lunch time, have a nice salad sandwich and settle down for the afternoon run. At around 2:30 the boss pops their head into your office and reminds you of a report they need in 30 minutes. Your stress levels go through the roof. You bust out the report, get it to your boss, but you're worried it was not up to scratch. Your stress levels are through the roof so you decide to head outside for some fresh air.

On the way down you pass the vending machine. You pull the loose change out of your pocket and buy yourself your favourite chocolate bar—because you deserve it. Once you get outside you devour the chocolate bar and straight away your stress levels are washed away. Feeling better, you head back to your desk to get on with the afternoon's work. But within 20 minutes you start having second thoughts about the chocolate bar. You swore that you would cut all 'bad' foods out of your diet and now you've blown it. The guilt sets in and you feel your stress levels starting to rise again just because you ate that chocolate bar.

The only coping mechanism you know is to have something to eat to make you feel better, so as you are leaving the office at the end of the day, the vending machine is calling. You reach into your pocket and see if you have any loose change.

Eating doesn't have to be this way. We live in a society where we place so many rules on what we should and shouldn't eat. This is counterproductive to health, both physical and mental, and in most cases results in feelings of guilt and shame. Making changes to our eating practices should be based on likes and dislikes, personal preferences and enjoyment. As soon as you move away from these basic principles, change becomes too hard and a sense of failure sets in.

So what can you do to overcome negative food associations?

- Change your mind set — think of all foods in a positive light. Don't label foods as 'good,' 'bad' or 'clean' but reword them as healthy or unhealthy, sometimes or all-the-time foods.
- Change your eating habits — do you have a cheat meal or a cheat day? Get rid of that straight away. The word cheat implies you are doing something wrong. Cheat meals/days are designed to reward you for all the 'good clean' eating you have been doing all week. Shouldn't eating healthy be enough reward?
- Plan ahead — if you really like chocolate, ice cream or Tim Tams, include these in your usual intake. Don't eat the whole tub, bar or packet but simply give yourself these each day because you enjoy them. A small snack won't ruin your health or your figure.
- Re-introduce your old favourites — if you have cut out bread, pasta, potatoes and any other 'anti' foods in your diet, slowly introduce them back into your intake. You will be surprised how enjoyable they are both to eat and for your health.

In reality it's not all that hard. What makes it hard is our mindset and the thoughts we have about certain foods. As cliché as it sounds, a healthy balanced diet, eating foods from all food groups (the less processed the better) and eating in moderation is what it is all about. Removing the negative thoughts and behaviours will help clear your mind so you can focus on what really matters, you!

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