

## » Question and Answer

# Children and Compulsive Overeating

### Question:

My daughter is 13 years old. I believe she pays excessive attention to food. Before she goes to sleep in the evening, she is continually asking what we are going to eat for breakfast. In the morning, she is interested in lunch. Being hungry all the time, she is lost in a vicious circle of eating. When we pass by a confectionery or grocery shop, she is suddenly ravenous. I kindly explain to her: we eat, when we are hungry not when we see delicious food. My words usually fall on stony ground. Sometimes she goes crazy about food and I have no other choice than to buy her something. She is putting on weight, but she does not care. All she cares about is food. I would like to add that my weight is not ideal either. I have been battling with weight loss my entire life. I know how it is to be obese to my cost. That is why I am worried for my daughter. I do not want her life to be marked by obesity. How can I help her lose weight? I would also like to instil an active lifestyle and healthy eating habits in her mind.

### Answer:

You experienced obesity first-hand. That is the reason why you are probably well-aware of the fact that there is nothing you or anyone else can do to “instil” certain habits (although they are healthy) in your daughter’s mind. You cannot stop her pathological (addictive) relationship to food which compels her to overeating and consoling herself with sweets, although I do understand that you, as a mother, who loves her daughter, do not want her to be confronted with the same kind of problems you are dealing with. However, you have the most effective method at hand. You can be a model for learning. It may not work straight away, things may even get worse in the meantime, but it is the only method for a long-term success. I do not want you to control her food. Control is helpful only up to the moment when the addiction starts. After that, control does not help. Your daughter is not a child who sits in her baby seat and is told what to do anymore. I wonder whether your long unsuccessful battles with weight loss are not misunderstood. She may perceive them as an indication that food is too important, that it is not possible to succeed, that there is something “heavy” in your relationship to food.

Eating disorders have a psychological meaning: we sometimes “swallow up” and restrain or “bring up” things we cannot “ingest”. Of course, I cannot make any conclusions about what is bothering you or your daughter. Growing up into a woman is stressful in itself. Comments about their development may be traumatic for the adolescents. You will set a good example for your daughter if you show her how problems are being solved not “swallowed up” - if you, by participation in an eating disorders programme, succeed in taking up a different position on a question of food. At the same time, you will prove your love to her in the most beautiful way possible.

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