

A Sample of my book “Oxygen Mask- breathe easier about your relationship with food”

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Sensory traps: smell, taste, texture, look, suggestion

Before we even eat food, we are subject to a variety of stimuli that can make us want food. We can smell food and see it and be tantalized by it. We can imagine the texture of certain foods—their crunchiness or their smoothness attracts us. Just the memory of the taste of a food from the last time we ate it can be a strong stimulus. Even someone else talking about food can send us into feelings of desire.

I will never forget how, after counseling about 16 people one day, I went home craving shrimp and strawberries. Two of my clients had talked about those foods that day. It was a very odd suggestion to crave them together, but that was all it took for me to want shrimp and strawberries.

I lived behind a bakery and every morning, with the aroma coming from that place, I craved donuts! I was almost drooling as I got into my car. Usually, when I drove away, the craving passed, but I will always remember the power of those aromas. The smell of barbequed meat does the same thing for me.

I always loved the way that bakery items looked so delicious, but when I ate them, it wasn't as good as I had imagined. So I stopped buying them. Now I can simply look at them, remember my disappointment in how they taste, and I don't need to eat them.

The texture of some foods—crunchy, smooth, or grainy—is enough to lure us into eating them. I used to enjoy a certain mousse yogurt because of its bubbly texture. The texture was so important to me that if the yogurt mousse was bumped or dropped so the air bubbles left it, it just wasn't the same and I wasn't as interested in eating it. I feel a similar disappointment when I imagine corn chips being soft or stale. Some people like the textures more than they like the taste of crunchy food. I like the crunch of croutons in a salad, but put them in the fridge and they become unappealing—just soggy, seasoned bits of bread.

Let your senses guide you to *ideas* about food appeal, but be aware of what it is—*only an idea*, not a suggestion to rush to eat. Let the smell just be that, a smell. Let the sight be just a nice view. Satisfy your desire for something sweet with fresh fruit. Frozen pineapple chunks works for me every time. When you need food with crunch, try fresh veggie sticks or make your own baked pita chips. Explore other seasonings besides salt to flavor your foods. Above all, evaluate your cravings within the context of your day's food plan. If you must give in to a craving, make it a healthy choice!

Looking for a complete sensory food experience? Have an orange. You cut into the peel with a knife and the juice sprays lightly on your lips and you lick your lips and taste the sweet orange spray. Peel away all the rind and divide the fruit into the sections. Bite into a piece and experience the fresh orange juice as it splashes your taste buds. It is so cold and sweet on your tongue. Each bit is so juicy that it drips down on your hand and onto your plate. Nice, isn't it!

Write down how smell, texture, taste and suggestion have got you into food trouble in the past.

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What is your self-talk about those senses?

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Accepting my suggestion that you can appreciate the sensual nature of food without acting on this stimulus, what changes are you going to make when your senses tempt you to eat?

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Transfer these ideas into your Pocket Journal.

Self-gratification lapses

The act of satisfying your own sense of pleasure and giving into your food desires can threaten your daily food plan. Do you live dangerously by eating what you perceive as forbidden foods? You might have a chuckle at this now, but really dig into the idea! As adults, are we acting out what our parents or the adults in our lives told us was forbidden or unwise to consume? Are we being childish? Or shall I say childlike? What does it do for us to eat or even overindulge in these foods? For example, I loved hot fresh bakery buns as a child, but was told, “No, you can’t eat the whole bag!” Then as an adult, I took a secret pleasure in consuming a whole bag of those buns? Most adults wouldn’t consider this a prudent or wise choice, but I’ve done it! And I know that many of my clients have done it or something similar. Are we doing this out of spite? Or just because we are adults and we can make these choices if we chose to? Do you believe in self-gratification when it comes to food?

Here’s a crucial question that will give you the answer: “Would you do this behavior publicly in front of others?”

What do you do if you have a self-gratification lapse? Here’s a story to illustrate what I did. One day, I ordered four slices of a lemon poppy seed loaf to take home. In the bakery, I asked for a lot of napkins, indicating that the four slices would be shared by a group of people. The truth was that I was too embarrassed to admit that I might eat 2 or 3 of these slices in one sitting—in private, of course. And, I did just that. The slices were delicious; I tasted every bite!

How did the rest of my day unfold? I realized I indulged in 3 slices and decided that I would skip lunch to stay on track, then have a light snack before dinner, and then have a light dinner. Do I recommend this as a good habit? Absolutely not! But if a self-gratification lapse does happen, just incorporate it into your day’s food plan. Next time plan better: only have one piece and then immediately freeze the rest. Adjust your lunch or the rest of the day for food consumption—and move on!

If I weren’t comfortable enough with my decisions to do this, I would not even have gone to the coffee shop that sells the loaf. I would not linger over the showcase of treats; I would focus on my companions and our conversation. If my companions were part of my support group, I would say to them, “My plan is that under no circumstances am I to leave with a couple of slices of lemon poppy seed loaf.”

What are some foods that may cause a self-gratification lapse in your food plan?

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Why do you think that happens?

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What could you do differently to avoid self-gratification lapses? (How would your self-talk sound?)

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