

BY DALE FLETCHER, M.S.

Faith and HEALTH Connection

Overweight? Find Freedom from Overeating

Have you lost hope in your weight loss efforts? Do you lack self control in your eating or are you an emotional eater? Is your willpower to sustain your exercise program waning? If you struggle with these issues to maintain a healthy weight you're not alone. Read on to see how your faith can help.

What the Research Shows: A [2007 report](#) by the International Food Information Council indicates that 66% of Americans are concerned with their weight and that 56% are actively trying to lose weight. Not surprising as a government report from 2006 shows that 66% of adults in the US are either overweight or obese.

Excess weight is a result of energy imbalance over a period of time as people consume more calories than they burn. Individual behaviors, environmental factors, and genetics all contribute to the complexity of the obesity epidemic in our country. Some illnesses like hypothyroidism and Cushing's syndrome may lead to weight gain. The use of steroids and some antidepressants may also be a factor. Finally, some experts suggest, and I agree, that many people's eating habits and weight are related to how they handle stress and strong emotions. In fact, a 2006 survey conducted by the American Psychological Association showed that 31% of women and 19% of men are 'comfort eaters.'

What the Bible Says:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Jesus in John 6:35

Open your mouth wide and I will fill it with good things. But I would feed you with the finest wheat. I would satisfy you with wild honey from the rock.

Psalm 81:10 & 16

For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands.

Psalm 119:143

I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments.

Psalm 119:45

What You Can Do: When turning to food to cope with emotions or stress becomes a habit and continued in excess it can contribute to weight challenges. God tells us in the Bible that if we turn to Him and follow His ways that He'll take care of our emotional and spiritual needs. When we're stressed or upset, God does not want us to go to the refrigerator

and eat foods that might temporarily soothe us. Instead, He wants us to go to Him to meet what really may be a spiritual or emotional need. God wants us to have the "best of foods." A candy bar, piece of cake or a bowl of ice cream will do little to satisfy an emotional or spiritual need but God can, as the verses above tell us.

The Hebrew word for rock in verse 16 of Psalm 81 is *sur* meaning a place of security and safety. That's what God wants to be for us. When we need a place of security or safety He wants to be that place for us. When we are stressed over a life situation and are looking to feed the temporary emotions like loneliness, fear, anxiety or pain God does not want us to turn to food to be satisfied. He wants us to turn to Him. He wants to "feed" us in a way that really satisfies our deep needs.

It's not necessarily what or how much we're eating that may be the main issue with food but rather it's what's eating us deep on the inside. The next time you have a deep need because of a situation or event in your life, try turning to God instead of food. Put on a favorite CD or start up your MP3 player and listen to songs that remind you of God's nature. Open up the Bible and read your favorite scriptures. Or humbly get down on your knees and pour out your heart to God. Ask Him to meet that deep need.

Perhaps you've lost hope in your efforts to lose weight. A deepening of faith in God and in the promises found in the Bible can provide you hope. Do you find that you lack the self control to limit the amount and type of food that you're eating? The deeper your faith and the more time you stay connected with God, the more self control you'll likely develop. (Galatians 5:22-23) Or maybe you've lost the willpower to sustain the necessary changes in your physical activity or healthy eating patterns. Once a person has accepted Jesus as their savior, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in their body. In a mysterious way, the Holy Spirit then gives them special power that they'd otherwise not have to make and sustain these important behavior changes when they ask God for help.

Finally, an aspect of your challenge to lose weight may be your thinking patterns. As long as you think and feel you're defeated your behaviors will probably reflect a defeatist attitude. The last thing that the devil wants is for you to feel a sense of freedom and liberty from your weight issues. As long as you continue your negative thinking and feel defeated you'll be less effective at being all God wants you to be. Reading regularly from the Bible and understanding and believing its truth can help to transform your thinking and your resulting behavior. The more we grow in love with Jesus and follow the principles of the Bible out of a personal faith, the more emotional and spiritual freedom we'll experience. This freedom will likely help reduce the use of food to meet emotional needs and help you to lose weight.

© 2008 Dale Fletcher, M.S.

Dale Fletcher is a speaker and wellness coach who lives in Charlotte, NC. He writes and conducts workshops on the link between faith and health. Connect with him at www.faithandhealthconnection.org
This article appears in Faith and Fitness Magazine, Aug/Sept 2008
www.faithandfitness.net