Adopt an 80/20 Mindset
Avoid all-or-nothing thinking

Key Messages

Do you think of foods in two categories? Good or bad? Allowed or not allowed? This is often how diets describe food. This promotes very rigid thinking about food and eating. It is very black and white, without room for flexibility. It also expects perfection.

Many people feel that unless they are following a regimented diet, they will be unable to manage their eating. However, strict dietary rules make it easy to fail. In this case, if someone slips off their diet, they might think, "I've blown it now, I might as well eat whatever I want and try for perfection again tomorrow."

It is not helpful to try and eat a perfect diet 100% of the time. Have a relationship with food that is MODERATE and REALISTIC. Adjust your thinking so that you have an '80/20 mindset'. Everyone needs a treat now and again to avoid feeling deprived. In fact, it is a smart strategy to plan on having a treat so that you can indulge while still feeling in charge. The 80/20 mindset or way of thinking suggests that you make healthy food choices 80% of the time while allowing yourself some less healthy choices 20% of the time, GUILT-FREE. This helps decrease unhelpful 'all-or-nothing' thinking.

Here's what you do . . .

1. Don't try and totally avoid any specific food unless it is necessary for medical reasons.

2. Give yourself permission to have some flexibility with your eating pattern. Making healthy choices 80% of the time is very acceptable. This guideline does not require calculations to determine certain percentages of your diet. The idea is to intentionally plan to eat some of the foods you enjoy in small portions on occasion.

3. Plan to eat a favourite food once a week. This prevents the feeling of deprivation which can lead to unhealthy and uncontrolled eating. When you eat in a less healthy way on occasion, do not see it as "cheating", but rather as part of an acceptable eating pattern.

4. Tell yourself that there is no time during a snack or a meal at which it is too late to stop. Partial control of a problematic eating episode is better than no control at all.

You are not alone . . .

I love having an 80/20 mindset! I can't believe how much better I feel about my eating habits knowing that it's okay, in fact it's encouraged, to have occasional treats. I don't feel like I've cheated or "fallen off the wagon" just because I allow myself a less healthy food choice once in a while. My new 80/20 mindset has even decreased my food cravings.

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