

# Is Food a Problem for You?

by Jim Platt

It is no coincidence that we focus on food in this article. During the holiday season, while attending parties and family get-togethers, it seems like a wide assortment of special food appears wherever we go. “I shouldn’t, but OK, maybe one more of those chocolate covered, nut cream, cranberry soufflé rolls. I’ll spend an extra hour at the gym, no problem.”

Most of us overeat from time to time, and many people often feel they've eaten more than they should have. Eating a significant amount of food does not always mean that a person has an eating disorder. However, as the holidays fade and there are fewer “excuses” to rationalize preoccupation with food, some people may find themselves unable to change the relationship they have developed with it.

Recently, a member of the Dartmouth community contacted me and asked if I could write something pertaining to food issues. Because this employee has a profound understanding of the struggles related to this topic, I asked—and she agreed—to write about her personal experience with these issues:

---

## MY STORY

*Year in and year out, my New Year’s resolution was pretty much the same: Lose 5, 10, 15, 20, 50, 100 pounds. Over a period of fifteen years, my weight climbed from a lean, healthy 145 to 262 pounds. Eventually, I gave up hope of losing any weight and simply resolved not to gain any more. What I didn’t know then was that I was suffering from compulsive overeating.*

*I ate not to satisfy a physical hunger, not to nourish my body, but to “fix” however I was feeling at the moment. I ate if I was tired. I ate if I was lonely. I ate if I was sad. I even ate if I was happy. The emotion was unimportant, the response was the same – whatever it was that I felt, I ate so that I wouldn’t have to feel the feeling. On difficult days at work, I ran back and forth from my desk to the vending machine. At night, I’d make dinner with the intention of having several meals of leftovers, and I’d eat it all that night. I was terribly ashamed because I couldn’t stop. No matter how many promises I made to start a diet or stop bingeing, I could not overcome my compulsion to overeat. Like an alcoholic with alcohol, so I was with my drug of choice: food.*

*I first learned about compulsive eating two years ago, in January, after resolving, yet again, “not to gain any more weight.” In these two years, my understanding has grown and changed, and today I am on a road to recovery.*

*This year, my resolution is to, one day at a time, abstain from compulsive eating.*

---

### Doctors generally agree that people with serious binge eating problems often:

- feel their eating is out of control;
- eat what most people would think is an unusually large amount of food;
- eat much more quickly during binge episodes;
- eat until they are so full that they are uncomfortable;
- eat large amounts of food, even when they are not really hungry;
- eat alone because they are embarrassed about their amount of food; or
- feel disgusted, depressed, or guilty after overeating.

*Continued on next page*

Binge eating also takes place in another eating disorder, called bulimia nervosa. Persons with bulimia nervosa, however, usually purge, fast, or do strenuous exercise after they binge eat.

If you think that you might have binge eating disorder, you may want to get professional help. Talk to your health care provider about the type of help that may be best. The good news is that most people do well in treatment and can overcome binge eating.

For more information on this topic, or to speak with a counselor, please contact the Faculty/Employee Assistance Program at 646-1165, or Blitz <[Faculty/Employee Assistance Program](#)>.

The following organizations have very helpful Web sites:

**National Eating Disorder Association**

[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

**Academy for Eating Disorders**

[www.aedweb.org](http://www.aedweb.org)

**Harvard Eating Disorders Center**

[www.hedc.org/](http://www.hedc.org/)

**Overeaters Anonymous New Hampshire**

[www.oanewhampshire.org/](http://www.oanewhampshire.org/)

**Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous**

[www.foodaddicts.org/](http://www.foodaddicts.org/)

---

**Here is a series of questions from Overeaters Anonymous that may help you determine if you are a compulsive overeater:**

1. Do you eat when you're not hungry?
2. Do you go on eating binges for no apparent reason?
3. Do you have feelings of guilt and remorse after overeating?
4. Do you give too much time and thought to food?
5. Do you look forward with pleasure and anticipation to the time when you can eat alone?
6. Do you plan these secret binges ahead of time?
7. Do you eat sensibly before others and make up for it alone?
8. Is your weight affecting the way you live your life?
9. Have you tried to diet for a week (or longer), only to fall short of your goal?

10. Do you resent others telling you to "use a little willpower" to stop overeating?
11. Despite evidence to the contrary, have you continued to assert that you can diet "on your own" whenever you wish?
12. Do you crave to eat at a definite time, day or night, other than mealtime?
13. Do you eat to escape from worries or trouble?
14. Have you ever been treated for obesity or a food-related condition?
15. Does your eating behavior make you or others unhappy?

**Have you answered yes to three or more of these questions? If so, you may have a compulsive overeating problem.**