

GUEST COMMENTARY

Super-sized portions create super-sized people

Note: This week is Eating Disorders Awareness Week, a national observance period designed to educate the public about eating disorders and direct attention to the harmful consequences that eating disorders can have on a person's overall health. It also focuses on the emotional issues that can deprive people with eating disorders of a happy and productive life.

In the beginning

This is a story about a land of super-sized people who eat super-sized portions. Once upon a time, there was a place called McDonald's. The original order of McDonald's fries weighed in at about 2 ounces and contained 200 calories. By 1972, the large order of McDonald's fries was introduced that had 320 calories. By the mid-1990s, the term "Super Size" was coined for the grand fries weighing in at a whopping 540 calories.

It's no wonder why we are a nation of overeaters. We have been super-sized. Throughout the past 30 years, our appetites have been super-sized and synchronized to overeat. We have been conditioned to place greater emphasis on the monetary/economic value of food as opposed to the nutritional value of the food we



By Amy G. McGuire

buy and eat. The "all you can eat" buffet is a great example of "getting the most for your money." We would rather save our wealth than save our health.

In a trio of groundbreaking studies, researchers from the University of Florida suggest that chronic overeating may be a substance-abuse disorder and should be considered an addiction. In comparing overeaters with alcoholics, the researchers say the brain responses and chemistry in both groups are similar. As such, a substance-abuse disorder can also be an eating disorder. So, what exactly is an "eating disorder"? Does it mean that a person's eating is out of order? Well, sort of.

What is an "eating disorder"?

An eating disorder is an emotional and physical problem associated with an obsession with food, body weight or body shape. The emotional and physical problems caused by an eating disorder are generated internally and externally with respect to the person's

internal feelings and their external living/working environments. The three most common types of eating disorders are bulimia, anorexia or binge eating (which is similar to binge drinking). Often, a person with an eating disorder diets, exercises, and/or eats excessively. These behaviors can have serious health consequences and can be life-threatening.

According to the National Eating Disorders Association, in the United States, conservative estimates indicate that 5 to 10 million girls and women and 1 million boys and men are struggling with eating disorders. Research shows approximately 40 percent of fourth-graders have been on a "diet" once in a while throughout their young life. Eating disorders primarily affect people in their teens and 20s; however, people from the ages of 6 to 76 struggle with some type of eating disorder.

Look for signs

What are the signs of an eating disorder? People with anorexia have an intense feeling of gaining weight, so they eat very little even though they may be thin. Anorexics may avoid mealtimes, pick at their food, track every calorie and/or exercise excessively. People with bulimia also have

an intense fear of gaining weight. Bulimics will eat excessively and immediately purge the food by vomiting or taking diet pills, laxatives or water pills. Binge eaters have frequent episodes of eating to excess but do not purge.

Enough is enough. But how much is enough?

Learning food portion skills is an important part of the recovery process. In other words, learning how much to eat can help people with eating disorders bring order to their table. So how much should we eat and what should we eat? With the "portion distortion" world in which we live today, most Americans do not know what a serving size looks like. As an example, an appropriate serving size of pasta should be about the same size as a tennis ball. However, a typical restaurant serving is about the same size as a softball. A 3-ounce serving of steak should be about the size of a deck of cards. One pancake serving is equal to the size of a compact disc. The size of one cookie serving should equal the size of the top of a soda can, not a Frisbee.

Food (a lot) pyramid vs. feed lot pyramid

The original food pyramid was designed similar to the feed lot pyramid. For cen-

have depended on carbohydrates to fatten their cattle and hogs. The composition of the feed is 61 percent carbohydrates, 25 percent fat and 15 percent protein. The fact that carbohydrates makes us fat is not news to farmers. To make matters worse, we super-size carbohydrate servings, which, according to the USDA food pyramid, is 60 percent of our dietary intake.

Pyramid makeover

According to an article in the November/December 2004 issue of *Weight Watchers Magazine*, research indicates that most of us recognize the U.S. Department of Agriculture food pyramid, but we do not use the food pyramid as a guide to proper nutrition and meal planning. To make the food pyramid more accessible, officials with the USDA are giving the pyramid a makeover. The new model, due out next year, will likely emphasize whole grains, low-fat dairy and fish. Stay tuned to www.cnpp.usda.gov/pyramid-update. Officials are also increasing the recommended fruit and vegetable intake from five to nine servings per day to five to 13 servings per day.

Reaching up, out and in

A person with an eating disorder experiences an internal conflict and is constantly

at war with food — sort of a food fight within. Externally, we are faced with "portion distortion" and multiple super-size offers advertised on television, radio, print ads and billboards. The Super Size concept is too much, which leads people to eat too much. Resolving the internal and external conflicts, saying "no" to super-size, eating more fruits and vegetables, and learning food portion skills are super ways to reach up, out and in.

If you or someone you know has an eating disorder, you can reach out to a mental health professional, your family doctor or the Mental Health Mental Retardation Services of Johnson, Ellis and Navarro counties at 817-558-1121. You can also log on to www.mentalhealth.org for information about Eating Disorders Awareness Week.

Next month, we'll celebrate National Nutrition Month with National School Breakfast Week on March 7-11. Until then, be well.

"Eat only what you need, that you not have it in excess." (Proverbs 25:16)

Readers are welcome to contact the Apple Lady at amy@amytheapplelady.com or visit her Web site at www.amytheapplelady.com