

FOOD: A COGNITIVE SHIFT

Would you consider using or doing crack cocaine?

Write down yes or no and why or why not. Make notes now and then come back to this exercise. In my book, *Beyond Metabolism*, I spent a great deal of time explaining how the reward centers of the brain work – and how modern hyper-palatable food works a lot like drugs in terms of targeting this part of the brain.

It is true that food works just the same way as recreational drugs to alter mood states. But while that book explained “what” is happening, if you have food/eating issues we need to go beyond the raw explanation of the fact that food can alter mood states. This is an exercise in perception, perspective and more importantly, cognitive shift in terms of how you see and perceive your own food/eating issues.

Since food works on the same area of the brain as drugs, and can create a habitual reaction in you it is not much different than crack cocaine. Therefore, from now on (at least for the next few weeks) you will substitute the word “crack” in your head whenever you are contemplating or considering acting on your food/eating thoughts or impulses.

Whether your issue is mindless eating or snacking, or full on binge eating, when you think about the issue or acting on it, substitute the word “crack” for the word “food” in your mind and self-talk.

Then just do the same thought/reasoning sequence that you always do and see where this takes you and how you feel about it. For instance a specific scenario may look like this: “I’m feeling really bad right now (or bored or anxious or whatever. I know that “crack” always makes me feel better or at least distracts me. I’m going to have just a little “crack.” A little extra “crack” won’t kill me. “Yes, I’m going to go out and splurge on some “crack” – I am going to cheat with more “crack” today. “I deserve some “crack cocaine.” I’ve had a tough day.”

Remember, in terms of your brain and those neural pathways, food works directly on the reward centers of the brain just as drugs do. And the capacity for food to create

habitual unwanted behaviour or thoughts is just as powerful. But you usually do not attach the same level of stigma to this effect of food, as you do to a drug you wouldn't consider using to alter your mood state – or numb or avoid your mood state. So food is your crack. You need to see it as such. And then of course the conclusion is obvious: **“crack changes my mood for a short time, or helps me avoid it... but then over time I just seem to want and need more crack.”**

This is an exercise in re-framing your food/eating issues and experience. It may have more power as long as you continue to practice doing it. Practicing this exercise can produce a cognitive shift in your awareness, by availing to yourself constantly, the response of your brain to this habitual behaviour. Many of you “understand” food as your drug of choice, but you never actually refer to it that way when it matters most. By altering the words and thoughts of “food” in your mind, and changing it to something more detestable and risky – you can shift your awareness as well.

So, are you the kind of person who would “do” crack?