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Eat Comfort without Guilt video

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Dr. Eagan says: Eat comfort food without the guilt

Story by: [Lori Corbin](#), Food Editor

With the tough economy, many people are stressed out, and turn to food for comfort. Why do we seek out that high carb, high fat food? Experts say it's a matter of brain chemistry.

Alyson Grant doesn't care that the macaroni and cheese did not come from a box.

"Everyone at my job has been working fewer hours every week. When it stresses me out, I find myself turning to comfort food just to eat," said Grant.

With the economy on a downward spiral the solution for many, is to eat.

Pasta, ice cream, pastry -- we usually tend to seek out foods that are high in fat. And while we might joke about it or even feel guilty, Dr. Terry Eagan says its actually human instinct.

"Many people are looking for the fastest way to change the way they feel. Many people, if not most people, have found that food is the way to do that," said Dr. Eagan.

"Mash potatoes, gravy and steaks, I like things like that," said Michael Warga.

Dr. Eagan says part of it is the chemical process in our brain when carbs are consumed. Elevated brain chemicals, like serotonin, reduce anxiousness along with boosting memory recall associated with calmer times. So it is actually okay to consume these foods with a few guidelines.

"We talk a lot about the mindful experience of eating which is tasting the food. Don't just eat it so quickly that you don't even realize that you've been satisfied. Enjoy each bite as you go along," said Dr. Eagan.

Don't bring the skillet to the table. Get a reasonable portion then sit down to eat.

Putting your fork down in between bites is also advised, along with socializing with friends or family.

"And then be less likely to have all the noise later about guilt and shame and 'I shouldn't have done that,'" said Dr. Eagan.

And if a binge happens to occur, Dr. Eagan says pass on guilt and avoid drastic dieting.

"We don't want people to get into a pattern of restriction. Because then, 'I'm not eating anything for a week.' That's just a set up to become over hungry and to do it again next time," said Dr. Eagan.

Making changes to high calorie comfort food also helps.

At Michaels in Naples, chef Mathew Poley recommends swapping butter for olive oil, using low fat dairy to reduce cholesterol and saturated fat in macaroni and cheese for example.

He also makes fruit cobbler which has no added sugar and no crust -- just a crumbly topping which cuts sugar and calories as well.

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