Q: I don't think what I am feeling can be classified as an eating disorder. I know that I am not eating enough calories in a day (I try to stay under 600 to 700), but if I go over that I feel like I failed, and that I'm never going to lose weight. I don't make myself throw up (although I have tried in the past).

Right now I am 20 years old, 5 feet and 129 pounds, but I want to get down to about 90. I'm short so I feel like I need to eat much less than everybody else. I recently moved and have lost about 10 pounds in the last month. I'm an active person and do sports about three to five times a week, and my college courses are very active as well. How can I get myself to not feel guilty about eating more calories?

A: Guilt should not be part of trying to achieve a healthy body weight. All that will do is make you feel bad about yourself. Negative thoughts do not help you achieve anything. Calories are not "evil"; they are beneficial to us. It is our source of energy. We all need enough calories to fuel our brain and body. If we get too little, our body slows down our metabolism to conserve energy for those very important tasks (such as breathing) and it makes weight loss more difficult to achieve. If we get too much, we store it for later use and gain weight.

Develop a healthy meal plan
First, I recommend determining what a healthy diet should consist of specifically for you. A good way to do this is to visit the website. At this site, you can enter in your gender, age, height, weight and activity level to calculate your calorie needs. I did this for you and found that you will maintain your current weight on 2,200 calories per day; 1,700 calories a day will help you lose about 1 pound per week.

The site then provides you with a meal plan for the calorie level you choose and shows you how much of each food group is to be eaten to meet your health needs. The site also has a "mypyramid tracker" that allows you to type in the foods you eat and tells you if you are meeting your needs each day.

Be sure to eat enough for optimum health

Remember, staying under 1,200 to 1,400 calories per day makes it very difficult to maintain good health. It is nearly impossible to get all of the nutrients your body needs on the "starvation" diet you are currently following (under 600-700 calories per day). I suggest that instead, you aim for healthy lifestyle changes that can last a lifetime.

Make slow changes that are manageable and practical. Worry less about the number on the scale and more about being healthy. Decrease foods and beverages that give you mostly calories from sugar and fat (junk foods). Add in whole foods, including whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, nonfat dairy, lean meats or meat substitutes, and heart-healthy fats (such as from nuts or olive oil).

Get help if you need it

If you find that your thought process still makes you feel guilty for eating a well-balanced diet containing the proper number of calories for you, then you may want to seek the help of an eating disorder specialist/counselor.

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