

## The Surprising Truth About Weight Gain, Body Image and Eating Disorders

by Sarah Maria

So much has been written on the topic of weight gain, eating disorders, and body image, and, by all appearances, the problem is getting worse. Statistics show that 95% of women dislike their bodies and their physical appearance, and now this rampant dissatisfaction has extended to men as well. Once thought to be the focus of teenage girls, studies are showing that eating disorders are increasingly prevalent among middle-age adults, and even beyond.

Is this gnawing discontent unreasonable? With obesity numbers reaching staggering proportions, you may very well think disgust with one's physical appearance is a normal, and perhaps even a healthy problem to have, if it helps people change their diets and their lifestyles. Then, of course, there is the advent of ever-new disorders, such as pregorexia (compulsively restricting food intake during pregnancy, which impairs the healthy development of the fetus) and orthorexia (an obsession with eating healthy, organic foods).

Is there any solution to this ever-growing and ever-present problem? Or are we doomed to be a population condemned to ever-expanding waistlines, and an ever-increasing obsession with how we look and what we eat?

There is a way to end these ailments, whether you are overweight, or have a distorted view of your body, or find yourself obsessing when you need to order non-organic. Yet, contrary to popular opinion, the solution doesn't come from solving the problem, *per se*. Rather, the solution comes from seeing the problem as an opportunity.

Now wait -- before you silently yell obscenities at me (What do you mean my life-long affliction with food and with my body is an opportunity?!), and stop reading this article immediately -- stay with me for just a second -- give me a moment to explain what I mean.

As long as you consider your struggle to be a problem, you reinforce your belief that there is something wrong with you that needs to be fixed. If you are overweight, and especially if this has been a life-long or at least a long-term challenge, you probably have a story or two about what is wrong with you. It might sound something like this:

"I am lazy." "I just like food too much." "I can't stay away from sweets." "I have no self-control."

"I am a fat slob -- I will never have the body I want."

Depending on your particular disorder, your story might also sound something like this:

"I must be thin." "I will hate myself if I gain weight." "I wish I had her body." "If I eat, I will get fat." "I must exercise all the time or else I will gain weight."

Now, in the beginning stages of body-image struggles and eating disorders, you may convince yourself that you do not have a problem, that everything is fine, and that you are perfectly normal. Yet after living in the mental hell described above for a while, you start to get a sneaking suspicion that something might be wrong. You get the notion that maybe you are not living with all the peace, tranquility, and love that is possible.

At this stage, you become convinced that you have a problem and are in need of a solution. You come to believe that something is inherently wrong with you. You know that there is more to life, that you are capable of something great, but you are stuck in a web of pain and suffering, not sure which way to turn.

In my experience, having healed myself of a negative body image, eating disorders, and obsessive-compulsive behavior that lasted for well over a decade, I have found the following to be utterly transformative:

Your greatest struggle, your deepest pain, your most desperate confusion, holds the keys to your transformation. The secret is in shifting how you look at your problem. Instead of seeing it as a problem, consider it an opportunity. Now, it is up to you to discover the opportunity. It is easy for others to point out a problem to you, but you alone can uncover and in fact create an opportunity out of your adversity. Every challenge holds the keys to unlimited blessings; you need only become aware of your ability to transform your reality, and then stay open and alert to possibilities that come your way.

According to eastern wisdom, we all have within us the ultimate guru or teacher. This teacher is always with us, always calling us to discover our true greatness, our inner-being, that part of ourselves that is magnificent, grand, and wondrous, that part of ourselves urging us to live our very best life.

Unfortunately, very few of us learn how to listen to this inner-teacher as children. As we go throughout life, we lose our connection to ourselves, becoming increasingly tossed to-and-fro by the challenges and adversities

of life. Our life becomes a mess of problems and adversities.

These problems, whatever form they take, are opportunities in disguise. They are calling you home. The challenges you face grab your attention. When you don't listen, you find yourself stuck in a seemingly disastrous web of suffering, possibly unable to stop eating despite the health risks of your weight, unwittingly starving your own child because of your insecurities, refusing to eat after your recent divorce, or whatever form your particular suffering takes.

Yet you always have a chance to return home. You always have the opportunity to dive within yourself and connect with this inner-teacher. No matter how much pain and suffering you are experiencing in any moment, you always have the choice to stop, close your eyes, look within, and seek to discover the seeds of opportunity that are latent in your current adversity.

So whether you, yourself, are struggling with excess weight, an eating disorder, a negative body-image, or any other problem, or if a friend or loved one is struggling, here are a few simple steps to help you connect with your inner-guide and unleash the opportunity that will transform your adversity into a great blessing:

1. Consider the possibility that your problem, whatever it is, holds the seeds to opportunity. Just being open to this possibility will create a shift inside of you.

2. Take the time to go within. There is no substitute for diving deeply within yourself. As the teacher Krishnamurti once said, "In oneself lies the whole world, and if you know how to look and learn, the door is there and the key is in your hand."

Traditionally, going within is accomplished through the practice of meditation. There are many different styles to choose from -- the key is to make meditation a regular part of your daily routine. Regular meditation yields tremendous health benefits, both physically and psychologically, and it also helps you tap into your inner wisdom.

3. Find a teacher, guide, or a coach who can help you explore your internal landscape. When you are at the beginning stages of getting to know yourself, when you are beginning this path of spiritual and personal inquiry, a teacher, coach or guide is extremely valuable. This person could be a psychologist, a spiritual teacher, a yoga instructor, or a life coach. Look for someone who understands where you are coming from and a person to whom you feel a connection. Often this emotional bond is the most important component in getting you the assistance you need.

Remember always: you can transform any adversity into opportunity. Your greatest pain and greatest challenge can be your greatest gift to yourself and to the world. Dive within and discover the keys to create a body and a life of your dreams.

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