

How to kick your bad eating habits

As eating coach on Channel 4's The Fit Farm, Sarah Tay has helped the 10 overweight volunteers to take control of their diets. Here she identifies the seven deadly food sins that can trap us all

'I eat when I feel happy or sad'

The deal: 'Emotional eating is very common,' says Sarah. 'We feel emotions in our tummy – that butterfly feeling we get when we're falling in love or the churning feeling when we're nervous. But sometimes it's hard to identify exactly what you're feeling and, rather than try to deal with it, you'll literally try to repress it by pushing food down your throat.'

The solution: The good news, according to Sarah, is that once you've identified this as your problem you can get it under control. It's a behaviour pattern that can be changed, like any

other undesirable habit. 'Keep a food diary detailing what you eat and how you were honestly feeling at the time,' she says. 'Then you can start to see when you're using food as an emotional blanket and set about changing it.'

'I was brought up not to leave food on my plate'

The deal: Most of us can identify with this one. How many times when you were a child did you hear the words: 'Eat it up – there are starving people in the world'? It's a fair point, but with food portion sizes on the increase – think of all those super-size meals now available from the fast-food giants – it means we're eating far too much, according to the UK Association For The Study Of Obesity.

The solution: Sarah Tay believes that most people eat between a quarter and a third too much, so it's a matter of simply removing a quarter of everything you would normally eat from your plate, apart from the vegetables. And don't sit there with the food still in front of you. Remove the temptation straightaway by putting it back in the fridge.

'I diet for two weeks, then I'm back to my old habits'

The deal: Figures from the National Centre Of Eating Disorders suggest that in the past 10 years 70 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men in the UK have been on some form of diet. But while fad

regimes or starvation diets might produce short-term weight loss, most dieters get caught in a vicious cycle of yo-yo dieting. They shed the pounds only to regain them – and a few more for good measure.

The solution:

'It's an unrealistic target for people to stick to 1,000 calories or less each day. To lose weight at a sensible rate – 1-2lb a week – you need to cut back 500 calories a day. Whether that's by eating less food or hitting the gym for an hour is up to



the individual,' advises Sarah. 'Drastic diets don't work in the long term because they don't address the underlying behavioural problems.'

'If I eat one piece of cake, I end up eating the whole thing'

The deal: 'Binge eating can range from the extreme – such as bulimics cramming down frozen food just to satisfy their emotions – to the mild, such as eating a biscuit, then thinking 'Sod it!' and polishing off the whole packet,' says Sarah. 'It's tied up with a person's self-esteem. You feel bad because you've lost control, so you almost punish yourself by eating more.'

The solution:

Some nutritionists believe binge eating may be a throwback to our caveman past when food was scarce and we'd eat as much as we could in one go because we didn't know where our next meal was coming from. Sarah suggests you ask yourself this simple question before tucking into that next piece of chocolate cake: 'Am I really hungry and, if not, am I happy for this to sit somewhere on my thighs?' Harsh but effective!

'I'm addicted to junk food'

The deal: With our fast-food culture, this may be a legitimate problem. Indeed, the World Cancer Research Fund warned last year that super-sizing portions in the US was contributing directly to the rapid increase in the number of overweight and obese people, with similar trends noted in the UK. Experts here have warned that rising obesity rates are pushing up the rate of cancers in both men and women,

particularly cancer of the breast, womb, prostate and bowel.

The solution:

Sarah reckons that calling yourself an addict is an easy way to excuse your bad diet. 'It means you don't have to change,' she explains. 'There's some truth in the physical part of the addiction – there's a lot of hidden sugar in junk food like crisps and biscuits, so you get a high when you first have them, followed by a terrible low. Try to wean yourself off junk food by slowly cutting



Sarah gives healthy eating advice in The Fit Farm kitchen

case study 'I've lost a stone at The Fit Farm!'

Shelly Stevenson, 19, arrived at The Fit Farm weighing 12st with a serious addiction to deep-fried Mars bars in tomato sauce. She needed serious advice to help her realise her dream of becoming a glamour model

'I didn't realise until I arrived here that I'm an emotional eater. Sarah Tay was brilliant because she pointed out that I eat when anything slightly shakes me. She helped me to notice what my triggers are and deal with my emotions instead of trying to 'stuff' them down. I've been learning only to eat when I'm properly hungry and it's working – I've lost a stone already!

'Really getting to the bottom of my relationship with food means I can stick to this for life. Fit Farm has put me on the right track.

'My sequin bikini is hanging up in the gym to keep me motivated and soon I'll have the confidence to approach glamour model agencies.'

Now Shelly's feeling more confident about herself



A covered up Shelly before entering The Fit Farm



your child sees you eating their leftovers, that's something they'll do,' says Sarah. 'Also, it's this kind of snacking that leads to the pounds piling on. Tempting as it is to have just one chicken nugget, don't do it. Scrape the leftovers into the bin instead.'

'Boredom drives me to the biscuit barrel'

The deal: In a similar way to emotional eating, you're eating to fill a void. While the hit you receive from a sugary biscuit might provide a temporary buzz, the empty feeling will quickly return.

The solution:

A surprisingly high number of people don't know when they're properly hungry. 'I advise them to start rating their hunger on a scale of one to 10,' says Sarah. 'Extreme hunger is a 10, when you have loud tummy rumblings and a headache. You'll soon detect a pattern and see when you're eating just for something to do.'

back. It may take longer than you think. Introduce more water to your diet and gradually replace sugary snacks with healthier options, such as fruit or nuts.'

'I eat my children's leftovers'

The deal: Just as we kid ourselves that those crisps we ate didn't count because we were standing up, mums can convince themselves that the kids' leftover chicken nuggets don't count.

The solution:

'Remember that children take on their parents' behaviour, so if

Catch the last week of The Fit Farm on Channel 4, weekdays at 6pm and repeated at 8pm on E4

