



NUTRITION

FIGHTING Food Addiction

A recent University of Michigan poll found that one in eight adults older than age 50 showed signs of addiction to highly processed foods, including intense cravings and a lack of control around eating. Those in the study with worse mental health or increased feelings of isolation were more likely to have a food addiction.

“Food is an easy answer if a person is lonely, sad, unhappy, or looking for some immediate gratification from an unwanted emotion,” notes Becky Sharon, a health and wellness coach at **TriCore Wellness** in Naples. She explains that food addiction generally refers to having an unhealthy emotional connection with some foods and adds that she wasn’t surprised by the study’s results. “I think the mental health connection is the most critical

aspect of the study,” she says. “There is a connection between a person’s feelings about their health and happiness and how they eat.”

Sharon says she’s worked with many people who eat when they feel frustrated, lonely, or bored. If you also struggle with eating certain foods to cope with your feelings, she first recommends avoiding buying



that food or buying it only in small quantities. But then what happens when you have the food and want to eat it? Sharon has a few tips:

- Stop for a moment.
- Decide to wait 30 minutes before eating the food, and set a timer.
- Once time is up, decide if you still want to eat the food and enjoy every bite, or decide to wait 30 more minutes and set the timer again.
- Repeat until you decide you don’t want the food or until you eat it.

“When we take some time to decide if we want the food, we find that sometimes we do and sometimes we don’t,” notes Sharon. She adds that making the decision—whether you choose to eat the food or not—is empowering.

“A decision is a great tool to eliminate the negative emotions that happen if you eat from a reaction or with a lack of control,” she explains. Finally, she notes that while food addictions are not eating disorders, they can lead to an eating disorder. “If you have an eating disorder,” she says, “see a mental health counselor immediately.” (tricorewellness.com) —E.K.

Tailored Smoking Cessation Programs



We all know smoking is bad for your health, but Florida residents may have a particularly challenging road when it comes to quitting. The State of Tobacco Control 2023 report from the American Lung Association listed Florida among the worst states for policies to reduce tobacco use, with low scores for restrictions around flavored tobacco products and funding for quitting tobacco.

“Tobacco use is the leading

cause of preventable death and disease in Florida,” says Dr. Javier Ley, director of **Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation** in Naples. “There are many opportunities for improvement that can translate into saved lives and better health.”

The foundation, which provides addiction and mental health care, offers smoking cessation options that fit each individual. To quit smoking, Ley also recommends speaking with your primary care

provider about medication or counseling or accessing a free coach or nicotine replacement therapy through the Tobacco Free Florida program.

“We know that quitting or reducing tobacco use could be a difficult journey to navigate,” says Ley. “Many individuals need multiple attempts at cessation or reducing use, but there is help and support out there,” he adds. (hazelden.org) —E.K.