

# Is NIGHT BINGEING

## *ruining your*

# DIET?

Are you sabotaging your slimming with a nightly treat? Here's how to stop the cycle...

**Y**ou have a bowl of porridge for breakfast and a salad for lunch. You snack on plenty of fresh fruit and nuts mid-afternoon and sip on green tea for good measure. But now, collapsed on the sofa after a tiring day, you've just demolished the best part of a packet of chocolate biscuits and feel furious with yourself. Come to think of it, this isn't the first time – in fact, fight it as you might, this has become something of a habit.

**But you're not alone.**

'I see this a lot with private clients and at my retreats,' says nutritionist and life coach Janet Thompson, author of *The Placebo Diet* (£12.99, Hay House UK, out 2 February).

'It all just comes down to programming, conditioning and food association.'

'Every day we make around 200 decisions about food and very few of those are made consciously. More than 90% are made unconsciously in response to emotional triggers or just repetition of a habit.'

### Make a change

Difficult as it might seem, change is possible once we understand what is driving the desire and steamrolling our good intentions. 'Everything we do is to get a feeling,' says

Janet. 'If you have a feeling you don't like, and that can be anything from emotional trauma to boredom, you are programmed to make yourself feel better. If, in your past, you learned that food makes you feel good then that's what your brain goes to.'

Unfortunately, the brain's impatient demands for instant gratification don't take into account how we'll feel half an hour later. Which is why, Janet says, we need to find ways to change our habits.

'If you just try to stop the behaviour, the feeling that triggered it will still be

there,' she explains. 'That leads to real cognitive dissidence (the stress you experience over a mental conflict) because half of you is trying to do one thing and the other half is trying to do something else. That's a really unsettling feeling

and, nine times out of 10, the desire for the reward will end up being far greater.'

### A new reward

So, in order to change the habit, you have to find something else that makes you feel just as good, but without the extra calories that end up derailing your diet.

'You need a new reward,' says Janet. 'You get the same cue, you do something different and you still feel better. You don't get that cognitive dissidence and you start to reprogramme yourself.'

So how do we know when the binges

*'Everything we do is to get a feeling'*



are a problem? 'It becomes a problem when there is a loss of control,' says Janet. 'If you find yourself doing it without even thinking about it. If you feel angry and disgusted with yourself afterwards.'

Janet advises stopping whatever eating pattern you are following during the day, no matter how healthy it seems.

'The problem is people always want to take anything but the middle ground,' she says. 'They want an extreme all the time and your body just doesn't live that way. It could be that whatever you're doing to yourself is causing you enough pain that by the evening your pain threshold is at its max, and then you just revert to type.'

Lorna Garner, chief operating officer of eating disorder service Beat, suggests talking to your GP first if your eating habit feels to be getting out of hand.

'Although habitual eating is not an eating disorder, if it's something you feel you can't control then you should still speak to your GP because you could still develop other health issues,' she says.

◆ **For more info about The Placebo Diet online course, book and retreats, visit [theplacebodiet.co.uk](http://theplacebodiet.co.uk)**

## Could it be Binge Eating Disorder?

**C**ases of extreme overeating could be a condition known as Binge Eating Disorder (or BED). Where anorexia is about restricting food intake and bulimia is about eating and purging, Binge Eating Disorder involves eating vast quantities of normally 'forbidden' foods in a very short space of time.

Episodes are usually preplanned and always in secret. They are then followed by feelings of self-loathing, guilt and disgust.

This little known condition accounts for almost half of the estimated 725,000 eating disorder sufferers in the UK, making it more common than both anorexia and bulimia.

'The key thing about Binge Eating Disorder is quantity,' says Lorna Garner. 'The amount of food is really excessive – a carrier bag of chocolate bars eaten within an hour, for example. It can be in the middle of the night or day. And what would determine whether it is BED is a person's mental state. Eating disorders are a mental health issue.'

'As soon as you recognise symptoms in yourself that may be an eating disorder, the earlier you get referred for treatment, the greater your chance of recovery. It is far better to speak to your GP than not. There are good outcomes for people who have cognitive behaviour therapy.' **B-eat.co.uk**

