

FOOD ADDICTION: A NEW FORM OF DEPENDENCE?

Walter Milano¹, Anna Capasso²

¹Simple Departmental Operative Unit, "Eating Disorders", ASL North Naples 2- Italy, ²Department of Pharmacy, University of Salerno, Fisciano (SA) - Italy

Food addiction is a behavioral dependency that is characterized by the compulsive consumption of palatable foods (for example, foods high in fat and sugar) - the types of food that markedly activate the reward system in humans and in other animals - despite the negative consequences. The psychological dependence has also been observed with the presence of withdrawal symptoms when the consumption of these foods is interrupted by the replacement of low fat or sugar foods. In the compulsive eater, the ingestion of trigger foods causes the release of the neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine. This could be another indicator that neurobiological factors contribute to the addiction process. On the contrary, abstinence from addictive foods can trigger withdrawal symptoms. The subsequent decrease in serotonin levels in the individual can promote higher levels of depression and anxiety. Therefore, the Food addiction may be considered a "new dependence" related to compulsive consumption of food. In particular, as regards food addiction and eating disorders, there is still no precise definition, but the interest in this problem is very strong. As reported in the DSM-V, substance dependence is characterized by physiological, cognitive and behavioral symptoms, demonstrating that the subject continues to use it despite being aware of the problems arising from it. A few decades ago, the thought that food could be a substance that creates "addiction" and that its excessive consumption could be defined as Food Addiction on a par with "Drug Addiction" was considered heresy. There are numerous evidences that allow us to "consider food as a drug", above all if it is manipulated refined food (Fast-Food, snack bars, chips...). Food Addiction is a new hypothesis to explain the growing phenomenon of obesity, a global problem that is affecting our era and which brings with it serious consequences for health.