

# The Inner Diet

You Can't Change Your Weight Until You Change Your Mind!

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## Part III: Psychological Discomfort

In Part Two of this eight part series, I addressed the strong influential role that stress plays in hindering your ability to stay on track, lose weight and manage your eating. Following Stress, the second most common psychological issue interfering with dieting and weight loss success is called **Psychological Discomfort**. My research with The Inner Diet shows that 72% of all overweight people struggle with this issue. In short, some people just can't seem to handle the intense discomfort that comes along with denying themselves their favorite old foods while dieting.

Let me say that there are actually two types of *discomfort*: **physical discomfort** and **psychological discomfort**. Physical Discomfort is a bodily experience that typically presents itself as hunger pangs and most people seem to be able to handle this fairly well while dieting. Psychological Discomfort, on the other hand, is an intense emotional experience that creates all kinds of problems for people seeking weight loss and this is the type of discomfort that my research has focused on. Let me give you an example.

Imagine that you're out to lunch with a bunch of friends. Further imagine that you are on a weight loss program and are about to eat your "*on program*" food when you suddenly begin focusing on everyone else's "*off program*" food. You see all the foods around you that you desperately want to eat and just can't seem to stop staring at it and fantasizing about it. The more you look at this food...the more mind consuming it becomes and the more desperate your desire becomes to eat it! For those with a low **psychological discomfort** threshold, dieting and lifestyle change seems like torture. It is this strong and internal mental tug-of-war that creates this intense feeling of **psychological discomfort**. If your ability to deal with this **psychological discomfort** is low, you will most likely succumb to the temptation, abandon your diet and eat that off program food.

This is a very similar concept to what is known as a pain threshold. In other words, some people can tolerate much more pain than others. Take going to the dentist for example. Some can go and be worked on with no problem at all while, others, begin to panic the moment they make the appointment. If your psychological **discomfort level** is low, dieting and weight loss will be a tortuous process that, in all likelihood, will end in failure. As a result, one of the key issues preventing most people from reaching their weight loss goal is this overwhelming and intense desire to avoid the inevitable **discomfort** that is intimately associated with dieting and weight loss. The remedy for this issue lies in bolstering your ability to withstand this kind of intense emotional discomfort.

This Psychological Discomfort issue lays the foundation for something in psychology called The Approach/Avoidance Conflict that was introduced by German psychologist and founder of Social Psychology Kurt Lewin. In short, Approach/Avoidance Conflicts result when a goal has both desirable and undesirable aspects attached to it. As luck would have it, weight loss provides the perfect environment for this emotionally charged psychological tug-of-war because it involves both positive

and negative elements. In Approach/Avoidance terms, part of you honestly wants to lose weight, feel better and get healthy (Approach) while, at the same time, another part of you is resistant to do what it takes to succeed (Avoidance). Sometimes we truly are our own worst enemy!

On the one hand you are moved to **approach** weight loss because of all the life enhancing, health benefits that it delivers. However, as you begin to become more involved in your weight loss program and begin missing your old favorite foods, you also find yourself confronted with **avoidance** behavior that is motivated by an innate mental resistance to change. These negative feelings begin to grow rapidly creating a powerful psychological desire within you to back away from weight loss in order to avoid these strong, uncomfortable feelings of discontent. Then, as you begin to drift further away from dieting and start eating your old favorite unhealthy foods again, your discomfort eases. As your negative feelings begin to subside, you feel the strength to approach weight loss again until these same feelings of negativity and avoidance again return, thereby motivating you to retreat once more. This Approach/Avoidance behavior is the underlying psychology behind classical yo-yo dieting.

The remedy for dealing with the pressure of Psychological Discomfort lies in increasing your discomfort threshold. My favorite example of someone employing a cognitive strategy to address this issue comes from a patient I had years ago. Her discomfort always reared its nagging little head at dessert time when she was out to dinner entertaining business clients with her husband. She said that every time the waiter asked about dessert, she would feel her discomfort level begin to rise dramatically as her willpower began to weaken. She said she could actually hear the voice of her impulsive inner child begging and pleading for that desert. At these times, she would simply close her eyes for a brief moment, take a deep cleansing breath and mentally send her demanding inner child to her room. This helped her to mentally separate herself from her discomfort and become the responsible adult she needed to be at that moment. This is just one example of a very simple but very powerful cognitive modification technique used to increase awareness, diffuse psychological discomfort and maintain control.

This ends Part Three of my eight part series. In Part Four I will discuss the third most emotional eating trigger called...**Perfectionism**.

Wishing You Great Health,

Dr. John H. Sklare