

My Addiction to Chocolate...

Julie Hryniewicz-Hache -- Wednesday, November 22, 2006, 8:16AM



Life Is Too Short

Julie Hryniewicz-Hache

Reading the Soonews article about a new study exploring problem gambling, I am reminded of just how many addictions there are out there. Having my own experience with gambling, and working with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission and in the local casino for over three years, I was able to witness, first hand, the sad reality of addictive gambling.

Prior to becoming a police officer, I used to go "across the river" to the casino for entertainment purposes. It was fun, I felt like I was out of town on vacation, and it would be an outing for my former husband and I, instead of going to the bars. That was until I realized that we could blow hundreds of dollars in just a couple of hours and our trips to the casino became more and more frequent. Initially, it was no big deal because we didn't have many bills, our daughter wasn't even thought of yet, and it wasn't like I was using our grocery money or anything...

It was exhilarating when we were "on a roll" and we couldn't wait to go back to win more money. That was until it started to feel devastating when we lost. We would hang on for just a couple more hands or a few more pulls to try to "win it back". We would go to the ATM machine "just one more time" because we were feeling "lucky". I would leave the casino feeling horrible and drained. This had been going on for several months and once I realized that people knew us by name, I started to clue in that we were considered "regulars".

My maternal Grandmother, who has since died, used to love her slot machines. She would have those little jackpot cards (that they would slip in the coin mechanism when you won on slots) all over her fridge and one day I asked her about her winnings. She replied that in order to win so many jackpots you have to play a lot and you always end up putting more in than you get back. She said it in a way that screamed, "Don't get caught in the trap unless you can afford to lose it."

When we decided to have a child, our gambling excursions practically stopped altogether. For one thing, I didn't want to expose my unborn baby to cigarette smoke, but expecting our first child was reason enough for us to put our money to better uses. Now we had a strong reason to save. I remember going to the casino for a New Years Eve party while I was pregnant and feeling guilty the entire time. I can count the number of times, on one hand, that I have been back in almost nine years since that night. My reason for not going was greater than my reason for going, and now, I will only donate my token \$20 to "charity" after having the occasional meal out.

Gambling, is not unlike my addiction to chocolate really. Gambling, eating junk food, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or doing drugs allows individuals a temporary reprieve from "real" life. For fleeting moments we are immersed in pure pleasure, joy, and fun. We justify that we deserve it, we make excuses for why it is okay. It is when we find ourselves feeling guilty or regretting these habits, after the fact, or constantly saying we should cut down, that we know there is something powerful going on beneath the surface that needs to be addressed.

Dealing with an addiction to gambling is no different than someone else's addiction to buying shoes or tools. If your habit is negatively interfering with your finances, your health, or your family relationships, then it is something to pay attention to. If people around you are concerned, if you feel badly because of your "habit", then it is time to take action. Explore the reason why you are indulging. You are the only person that can make this better. I know that I eat chocolate for two reasons: one is because it is a habit and the other is because it brings me pleasure!!!!

In times of stress, when I am bored, or if the wind blows a certain way, I crave chocolate. We tend to engage in activities that bring us comfort, even if that good feeling is only temporary. It is an artificial way to bring us joy. My addiction to chocolate has been a game within my family and my husband says that they would have to shut down a whole chocolate factory and I would be responsible for endless layoffs if I quit! Thus, I press on.

Taking stock on your habits is growth because you can decide to consciously choose or reject those activities that affect your life and those around you. Addiction means that we have lost control over the ability to make rational decisions. People who love us, care about us, and worry about us, often see the detrimental effects before we do because they get to see us from the outside. Experts say that the first step towards conquering an addiction is admitting that we have a problem... That being said, "Hi, my name is Julie and I am addicted to chocolate."

Wow, that feels good because I deserve to be as healthy, happy, and vibrant as I was created to be and when I am using something unnatural to fill a void in my life, then this is unhealthy. Although I claim to pay close attention to my health, I have been kidding myself that all of this sugar is good for me. Being even more conscious of what I eat, without completely depriving myself, is my new goal. If you see me in Dairy Queen; however, please remember my new motto, "Everything in moderation"!

Since it takes approximately three weeks to form a new habit, it is worth the effort to at least stop and ask ourselves a couple of questions before participating in any activity: Am I doing this out of habit only? Is this detrimental in any way to my health, finances, or relationships? What can I do instead to bring me a feeling of pleasure that is more beneficial?

The only way to overcome any addiction is to dig down to the root of what lead to the addiction in the first place and deal with that. Are you suffering trauma from your past, are you avoiding someone at home, are you bored with your life, or have you too been immersed in a "habit" without truly evaluating the risks? What can you do to take action to deal with that root issue and bring healthier forms of pleasure into your life? If you simply have too much time on your hands, can you use that time and energy on an activity that can benefit someone else's life? Life is too short to waste precious moments in the cycle of addiction. You deserve better!

"Believe you can, and you can. Belief is one of the most powerful of all problem solvers. When you believe that a difficulty can be overcome, you are more than halfway to victory over it already." Norman Vincent Peale

If you, or someone you love, is dealing with an addiction to gambling, call the Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline at 1-888-230-3505. If you would like to contact me, other than on this public forum, makeitwork@sympatico.ca is my direct e-mail address. Your life is worth any effort that you make to improve your days. Thank you for reading. Have an awesome day! Julie