

# The Inner Diet

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

Dr. John H. Sklare

## Part IV: Perfectionism

Welcome to Part IV of my eight part series on emotional eating. I would like to begin this discussion today by addressing the third most common issue that leads to diet disaster and weight loss failure called **Perfectionism**. My Inner Diet research shows that this issue is a serious problem for 51% of all overweight people who are trying to lose weight. That's just a shade more than half of everyone trying to lose weight. Since this is an issue that affects one out of every two overweight people, the chances are very good that this is an issue that is interfering with your ability to stick to your diet and lose weight. As a matter of fact, an article I read in the Wall Street Journal mentioned that "*Bariatric surgeons say they see a high correlation between perfectionism and obesity. Experts in eating disorders say that perfectionism is often at the root of anorexia, bulimia and binge eating.*" So let's take a closer look at this issue and see just how it frustrates and sabotages the dieting efforts of so many people.

Perfectionism is a personality characteristic that has both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, you will always find it associated with most highly successful people. When successful people are asked to describe themselves, perfectionist is an adjective they often use. Perfectionism is helpful for these people as it propels them on their relentless drive toward success and excellence. The truth is, however, that there is a thin line between perfectionism and behaving compulsively. My point is that, even though some people benefit from this behavior, it's not always a healthy quality. Those of you who grew up with parents who demanded perfection from you know all too well that a perfectionist is seldom happy and never truly satisfied.

Because no one is perfect, perfectionism in weight management is a built in guarantee of failure. Since this problem is so prevalent in overweight people, you may be one of those individuals who demand the impossible of yourself. That is, to be absolutely perfect on your diet and weight loss program. I understand how the perfectionist mind works and I bet I can tell you exactly how every program you have ever been on has ended. You commit yourself to some weight loss program and go along fine for some period of time, until you give into some little temptation. Now, being a perfectionist, you don't just slip a little and then quickly return to your program. No way! Once YOU slip, even just a little, the program is over.

The reason is that there's simply no room for error at all in the mind of the perfectionist. As a matter of fact, in the mind of a perfectionist, there is absolutely no difference at all between a minor slip and total failure! This *throw the baby out with the bath water* mentality is at the heart of the problem for these people. Now don't get discouraged if you are one of the 51% who fall into this category. On a more positive note, it's important for you to understand that this way of thinking and behaving is absolutely not a life sentence for you. Accepting the reality that you are a normal imperfect human being like the rest of us is the first step that you must take to begin solving this problem. The second step involves providing yourself with a mechanism that will help you to get back on track should you slip. In other words, you must join the real world with the rest of us and infuse some realistic thinking into your battle plan in order to eliminate this emotional eating trigger called perfectionism.

So, if you happen to be one of these people, what can you do? Well, the antidote for perfectionism is a three-step process that helps you to incorporate reality and flexibility into your program. First you must set realistic goals because the basic problem with the perfectionist is that they allow absolutely no room for error. That's simply an unreasonable, unrealistic and irrational goal so you must incorporate some truth and rationality into your thinking and planning.

The second step for combating perfectionism involves changing the way you think. It's the "*irrational belief*" that you have held onto and reinforced over the years (*I must be perfect or I'm a failure*), that leads you to ultimately become frustrated and then fail. For example, to the perfectionist, the thought that a minor slip equates to total failure promptly leads to the end result of bingeing or giving up. One thought leads directly into the other creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. The thought leads directly to the behavior. You can't have the negative result without the irrational belief. So you must ultimately challenge this irrational belief system if you are to succeed.

The third step in combating perfectionism also happens to be the motto to the Boy Scouts...Be Prepared. Since nobody is perfect, falling off the diet wagon is very common so you must learn to be prepared for those minor slips when they occur. For these occasions, I suggest that you create in advance what I call **A Retracking Plan**. It's a technique intended to help you get right back on track immediately after you slip. Here's how it works. Take out a piece of paper and write down a days worth of healthy meals and snacks. I then suggest that you go to the store and purchase what you need for these meals so that you have the ingredients available in your house at all times. Think of it as your diet emergency kit. Then, when you slip, you immediately go to your **Retracking Plan** and make these preselected items your next 24 hour meal plan. This prepares you for the inevitable slip, challenges your all or nothing perfectionistic thinking and gives you the exact formula you need for getting right back on plan. In short, set realistic goals, challenge your irrational perfectionistic beliefs and be prepared. Now that's the perfect solution to perfectionism.

This ends Part Four of my eight part series. In Part Five I will discuss the fourth most common emotional eating trigger called...**Inner Control**.

Wishing You Great Health,

Dr. John H. Sklare