

so what's **your** excuse?

BY JOY MOZZI

The human mind loves to justify its decisions. Making excuses and procrastinating is, for the majority of the population, an ongoing internal dialogue. Here is one:

“Well, I tried to get into the parking at the greengrocer but there was a forklift carrying a pallet of watermelons blocking the entrance and I just didn't have time to wait for it to move. Melons are still a bit pricey anyway. I might wait for them to come down to 99c a kilo.

“So I drove around the block a couple of times till I found a spot outside the take-away shop. What's for dinner Mum, when are you going to get home and can we have some more bananas? I'm coming. Am at the shops now and, no, I didn't get bananas, they were so expensive last time.

“How handy being right outside the takeaway! It's going to take 15 minutes. Better not be longer than that, I want to get home to watch *Survivor*. Bit too far to walk back to the greengrocer. Have to get some more money out to pick up the dry cleaning and a carton of beer for 'the man' on special at \$29.95 and a bottle of red, my favourite – well I deserve a treat too!

“I still have a few minutes to pop into the newsagent and get a \$50 credit for my mobile and hand in my Lotto pick, a small investment every week to possibly win millions. The new *Women's Weekly* is out. I look forward to putting my feet up and enjoying it with my glass of red after *Survivor*.

“The takeaway is ready. I add a couple of coleslaw containers, with a slight twinge of guilt that I didn't get to the greengrocer for fresh stuff. But pre-packaged coleslaw is better than nothing, don't you think? And besides the price of fresh produce is outrageous lately.”

Sound familiar?

TREATS

'Treats' – any delightful surprise or especially pleasant occasion.

Your mind says, “Oh yes!”, but your body says, “No thanks!”. Using the word 'treat' for a visit to a junk food outlet or having a chocolate bar/doughnut/pastry 'treat' after dinner conveys the wrong message to our brains. It might be convenient, tempting or addictive, but it is not a treat. Many of these choices create feelings of guilt. We know they are not good for us.

Children rapidly absorb information. Using alternative words or phrases related to food and food addictions can help them to think differently. A 'treat' (for the body) is splashing out and buying two punnets of strawberries instead of one, buying golden kiwi fruit even though they cost more and getting those cute yellow and red cherry tomatoes. Or visiting an organic wholesaler, buying a tray of grapes and saying to the family, “Help yourselves! Eat as many as you like.”

QUALITY TIME

No time to play games or read books with the children? Solution – food preparation as a family is quality time. Children rarely remember what you bought them, but they do remember the time you spend with them. Being in the kitchen washing, cutting, preparing and playing with food is a fabulous way to establish and maintain relationships with family members. Allow children to make decisions from an early age – “Should we grate or slice the carrots, would you like chopped or stuffed tomatoes?”

Teenagers especially tend to talk more when they are actively doing something with their hands and not making constant eye contact. Conversation becomes chatty. They talk about their friends, the school day and problems. All you need to do is listen and respond briefly (don't turn it into a lecture opportunity!). Again, ask them for suggestions with available foods. Encouraging independence will ultimately free you from having to prepare everything for them.

PARADIGMS

The way we used to eat has changed. Food pyramids have been turned upside down. Food allergies and intolerances have increased, diseases surround us. Be open to change, do some research and be prepared to think differently.

A picnic does not have to be only white bread and processed foods. Make a spontaneous decision on the weekend to jump in the car as a family or with friends, go down to your local greengrocer and, as a treat, let everyone choose something they like. Go to a park, the beach, spread out a cloth, chopping board and plates. Feast on fresh fruits followed by leafy green salads, nuts, dates, vegetable sticks and dips. Energy levels will be naturally exuberant and not artificially 'high', generated by a cocktail of preservatives. Fresh foods are hydrating in hot weather and good for keeping your skin looking youthful.

The average picnic, barbecue or party is a vicious circle – bowls of salty chips, sugary lollies or biscuits, fatty sauces, breads and dense proteins all create a thirst for something fizzy. This is your body saying it needs help to digest a stomach full of non-nutrient, heavy food. Fizzy drinks are high in refined sugar and diet drinks contain artificial sugars like aspartame. Antacids for indigestion create more health problems with side-effects and would not be necessary if people did not overeat or combine the wrong kind of foods.

OVEREATING

If the majority of your diet is processed, packaged and non-nutrient addictive foods, the appetite is never fully satiated. The body needs natural vitamins and minerals to function efficiently and sends out messages that it is not satisfied. This is generally misinterpreted as hunger and people continue to crave and eat salty, sweet and caffeine-loaded non-nutrient foods, which in turn contribute to obesity and health problems.

IT'S NOT EXPENSIVE TO BE HEALTHY

Open your cupboards – clothing, accessories, shoes, DVDs, books, junk, toys. Everyone wants everything which is then discarded in a box, cupboard or at the tip, only to buy more on the next shopping trip. The average woman will buy 63 items for her wardrobe and personal use in a year. People can afford to buy yet another pair of designer blue jeans at \$120 but then say that fresh fruit is too expensive!

Build a relationship with your local greengrocer – look out for specials. A box of tomatoes for \$10 and a box of sweet oranges for \$10 equals big bowls of chopped orange and tomato salads for a whole week. Feast on them! Buy in bulk and freeze, dehydrate and make chutneys or fruit pickles. Pigging out on a bowl of juicy tomatoes will only leave a smile on your face compared to cramming sickly sweet coloured doughnuts into your mouth and suffering the indigestion and guilt trip afterwards.

Use money saved from buying yet another outfit to buy kitchen equipment and utensils that make fresh foods fun and interesting.