

# End Emotional Eating!

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## What is Emotional Eating?

- Do You:**
- Eat alone after being with others?
- Eat what you consider "bad foods" when alone?
- Think about food and weight a lot?
- Eat when you are not hungry?
- Eat very quickly?
- Eat until over-full?
- Feel guilty after eating and feel out of control?



## What is Emotional Eating?

- Do You:
- Use food to cope with stress, emotional conflicts and daily problems?
- Use food to block out feelings and emotions?
- Feel like a failure at weight loss?
- Dislike your body?



## What is Emotional Eating?

- Does focusing on food and weight control substitute for the REAL issues in your life over which you feel little or no control?



Do you feel like you are an Emotional Eater?



## True or False

- It is normal to eat when you are hungry and stop when you feel satisfied

## True

- ❑ Every healthy person has an innate, biochemical system that regulates hunger and satisfaction in response to body's actual needs
- ❑ Emotional eating or poor impulse control may lead to loss of contact with this system over time
- ❑ You can reconnect with it and use it to establish normal eating behaviors and patterns that you can rely on, even when trying to lose weight

## True or False

- ❑ People should trust their food preferences to guide them in making healthy food choices

## True (and false)

- ❑ We all have innate tastes and preferences – “sweet tooth” or preference for salty/fatty foods
- ❑ These preferences enable us to make food choices that meet our nutritional needs
- ❑ But most of us live in a food environment that provides many food choices that appeal to our innate preferences but provide *empty calories or excessive calories/fat/sugar for their nutritional value*
- ❑ DO need to learn and use nutritional knowledge to navigate the way to “normal” food choices while respecting personal preferences

## True or False

- ❑ To lose weight, you must adhere to strict goals for daily calorie intake and exercise

## False

- ❑ To lose weight you must maintain a calorie deficit over time
- ❑ Body is *always* in process of using or storing energy
- ❑ Tracking calories eaten over 24-hour period is just one convenient way to monitor things
- ❑ Going “over” on calories on any one day does NOT mean you have blown it and should now proceed to eat the entire bag of chocolate chip cookies and then start your “diet” tomorrow or fast the next day to make up for it
- ❑ Simply a small bump in a very long road

## True or False

- ❑ It is abnormal to eat for any reason other than meeting your body's nutrition and energy needs



## False

- ❑ Food is never just fuel
- ❑ Body reacts to food in many ways
- ❑ Feeling of pleasure, relief from unpleasant physiological states such as anxiety, stress and low mood
- ❑ As babies we learn to associate eating with comfort, caring, human connection
- ❑ Human cultures have always given many deep, social and even spiritual meaning to food and eating
- ❑ Completely normal to use food for all these purposes
- ❑ NOT normal to use food as **PRIMARY** way of meeting those needs to push away uncomfortable feelings/thoughts

## True or False

- ❑ There are “good” and “bad” foods



## False (and true)

- ❑ Healthy, active body can use all kinds of nutrients, including refined sugar and saturated fat
- ❑ Importance is the **amount**
- ❑ Normal eating does not abide by strict or inflexible rules
- ❑ **Balance** between pleasure, health & fitness, good nutrition and meeting weight goals
- ❑ However, some foods are just plain toxic!

## True or False

- ❑ If you are trying to lose weight, you should expect to be a little hungry most of the time



## False

- ❑ Body should be able to handle a reasonable calorie deficit without experiencing chronic hunger
- ❑ Expect to feel hunger every 4 hours or so if you are eating appropriately
- ❑ If hungry more than that – may be eating too little or eating unbalanced meals or mistaking appetite (the desire to eat without actual hunger) for hunger

## Hunger vs Appetite

- ❑ Hunger – escalating, physiological sensations when body actually needs food
- ❑ Rumbling, unpleasant stomach contractions (hunger pangs), mild lightheadedness, difficulty concentrating, irritability, headaches
- ❑ Usually about every 4 hours, escalates after 5 hours
- ❑ Appetite – preferences, habits, tastes. The desire to eat even when not physically hungry!

## Emotional Eating vs Physical Hunger

- Emotional Eating comes on suddenly – “I have got to have a cookie now!”
- Physical hunger occurs gradually over time
- Emotional hunger is usually more specific – you crave a specific food like pizza or ice cream and only that food will meet your need. Appetite is a huge factor here
- When hungry – open to more options

## Satiety

- Satiety will occur when stomach reaches certain level of fullness – about 75% of maximum capacity
- Can escalate from mild fullness to “stuffed” to bloated and uncomfortable
- Even at satiety many people want to continue eating:
- 20 minutes for brain to receive signal that stomach is full and for brain to send “stop eating” signal
- Eating feels good!

## Healthy Eating

Involves a balance between eating and activity levels

Includes a variety of foods

All foods fit (treats are okay in moderation)

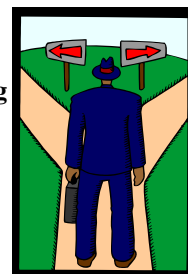
Does not involve strict dieting

Includes guidelines (3 meals and 1 snacks for example)

## Healthy Eating

**Adults are usually aware of what is healthy and what is not**

**What gets in the way of making healthy choices??**



## What gets in the way?

Food used as a way to cope with stress, emotional conflicts and daily problems

This happens in adults, adolescents and children

“When I am eating, I am not thinking about what upset me”

“When I am finished eating, I focus on feeling guilty and being angry at myself”

## Emotional Eaters

**May eat large quantities of food**

**May eat very quickly**

**May eat in secret**

**May choose foods considered ‘bad’**

**May feel ‘what’s the difference anyway’**

**May feel like a failure**

**May feel a numbing or comforting sensation while eating**

## Emotional Eating

Eating for emotional reasons:

2 factors may contribute:

\*how we deal with stress, anxiety, boredom, sadness (emotional)

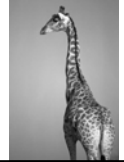
\*being over-hungry (physiological)

If you are physically hungry – YOU NEED TO EAT!

## Emotional Eating

**Stomach hunger:** Eating for physiological reasons. *Eating below the neck*

**Heart hunger:** self-medicating or self-soothing with food. May give feeling of numbness or attempt to fill void. Can be addictive eating. *Eating above the neck*



## Emotional eaters

Often EAT their emotions

rather

than FEEL them

Use food to “stuff down” feelings

## Emotional eating

- May become habitual (evening eating)
- May use this time to relax, or attach the eating to another activity, like TV or computer
- After work or school, takes our mind off the day
- Use food as a “transition” time from one activity to the next

## Emotional Eating

Do your emotions– depression, boredom, sadness, anger, joy, -- make eating decisions for you?

Important to identify trigger emotions

Important to take back decision making into your own hands

What do I really want?

## Coping with Emotions

- Before you eat ask . . .
- Am I physically hungry?
- What am I feeling?
- What do I **really** need?



## Coping with Emotions

- Figure out your Food-Mood Connections
- Do I eat when I'm bored, angry, tired?
- Try some Mood-Activity Connections
- Bored – call a friend
- Angry – go for a walk, vacuum vigorously
- Happy – walk the dog, dance to music
- Strategize alternatives: Toolbox

## Triggers

- Food is the most primitive form of comfort
- There are “triggers” to eating when not hungry
- Triggers: emotions, events, places, situations or people that produce a reaction in us that makes us want to eat
- Turn on the TV . . . haul out the chips
- Go to the movies . . . eat popcorn
- Fight with your spouse . . . eat the ice cream

## Triggers

- What are YOUR emotional triggers
- Straight to the cookie jar when you visit your mom
- Eat something the minute you walk in the house
- Friday afternoon - start craving beer and bar food with your buddies
- Order too much food/drinks at restaurants
- Keep a journal and see if there are patterns to your overeating

## Triggers

- Write down 2 or 3 events or situations in which your emotions (negative or positive) have probably caused you to eat
- Triggers:
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.

## AAA Strategies for Emotional Eating

- Tool to help you remember these key strategies:
  - Be **A**ware
  - A**void Triggers
  - Look for **A**lternatives

## Be Aware

- Once you've identified the trigger, you can be prepared next time it occurs
- Be Aware and Alert in these situations and do not let the emotions of the moment make you forget your goals
- Pause and ask yourself whether the short-term comfort of uncontrolled eating is worth the long-term impact on your weight loss/health goals

## Be Aware

- Be Aware that this way of dealing with your emotions is your way to cope
- It's something you learned somewhere in your life
- Now is your opportunity to learn something new: finding *non-food* ways to cope with your emotions

## Avoid Triggers

- Can't avoid all situations that trigger overeating
- Can avoid some people who push your emotional buttons and stress you out
- Family, busybody coworkers, noisy neighbors
- Also – if you have too many balls in the air – let 1 or 2 drop. Learn to say “no”
- Carve out some time for yourself
- De-stress – try yoga, meditation, relaxation exercises

## Look for Alternatives

- When you can't avoid situations that trigger emotional eating – look for better ways to respond to them
- Physical activity is one of the BEST ways to deal with stress
- Instead of running to a bar or to the freezer for ice cream, just RUN. Or walk, or swim
- Ride a bike, work in the garden, write in a journal
- Put on headphones and listen to music
- Get a massage

## Look or Alternatives

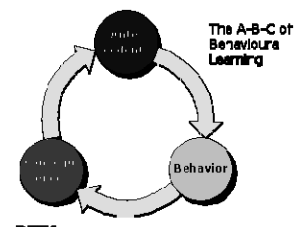
- Journaling can be very effective for dealing with emotions. Journal about the situation and what emotions came up for you. What pushed you toward eating – what can you try to do differently next time?
- Try meditation or relaxation exercises – buy tapes at the bookstore or order online

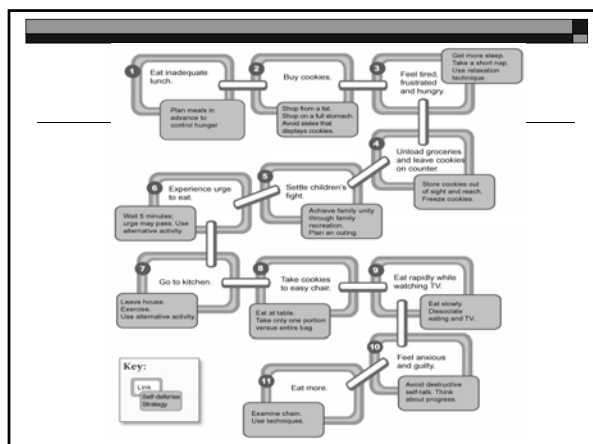
## Look for Alternatives

- If you can't avoid situations with food – try to prepare and be ready for challenges
- Be sure to keep healthy snacks at home and at work. Carry healthy snacks in the car
- Eat salad or vegetables at the restaurant bar instead of fried cheese and chicken wings
- Have a snack before you go to a social outing so you are not starving

## A B C: Behavior Chain

- Antecedent
- Behavior
- Consequences





## Why Dieting Doesn't Work

- Dieting doesn't offer anything you can use in THAT moment – when deciding what, when, and how much to eat
- Making good choices in the moment requires 3 skills:
  - 1. Ability to recognize your hunger and satiety signals
  - 2. Ability to distinguish between hunger, appetite and satiety and impulse
  - 3. Ability to stay grounded in your self and your goals so that it is YOU making decision

## Mindfulness

- When you routinely push aside that little voice in your head that tells you – for your own sake – that you may want to think twice about eating that candy, cheeseburger, etc, that voice doesn't go away
- Voice moves a couple of steps further down chain of events – gets louder
- Instead of hearing voice BEFORE you act – don't hear it until after you've done the thing you didn't really want to do – i.e. eat that bag of potato chips

## Mindfulness

- Instead of a gentle voice reminding you to *think before you act*
- Voice is screaming at you about what you did wrong – what a loser you are for not sticking to your goals
- Guilt – lots of time thinking and worrying about why you keep doing this sort of thing – get down on yourself – result: eat more

## Mindfulness

- When the quiet, nagging voice in your head starts saying that you are about to do something it doesn't approve of – LISTEN to it
- Stop what you are doing for a few moments to ask yourself – "Is this what I REALLY want to do?"
- If you don't, decide not to do the thing in question
- If you do, decide to do it – then do it mindfully
- If not sure – try to postpone your decision/action until you've had a chance to sort things out a bit

## Mindfulness

- After you've make your decision, act!
- Then take a few more seconds to notice how you feel about what you just did
- Note what you decided, what you actually did, and how you felt afterwards
- File this in your memory bank for future reference
- Once your conscience knows you are making the conscious effort to listen it will move back up to the proper place in the chain of events

## Summary

Emotional eating may be a sign of emotional distress  
 Identify underlying issues  
 Unravel role that food has in your emotional life (comfort, punishment)  
 Identify and recognize triggers  
 Consider alternative constructive coping strategies

## Summary

Avoid restrictive diets  
 Rigid diets often perpetuate nutritional and emotional deprivation  
 Focus on positives  
 Make sure you are getting enough sleep – if you're constantly tired you can't make good decisions



## Sustainable weight loss

More likely when we:  
 Identify what is not working for us right now  
 Eat in a healthy manner on a regular basis  
 Feel better about ourselves  
 Increase our activity level  
 Learn healthy coping strategies to deal with stress  
 Identify boredom and loneliness and modify the situation

## Resources: Books

- **Body Wars** by Margo Maine
- **Love the Body You Were Born With** by Monica Dixon
- **When Food is Love** by Geneen Roth (or any of her books)
- **When Women Stop Hating Their Bodies** by J. Hirschmann and C. Munter
- **The Beck Diet Solution** by Judith Beck

## Resources: Websites

- [www.aweighout.com](http://www.aweighout.com) (has a newsletter available. Free and pay parts of the website)
- [www.something-fishy.org](http://www.something-fishy.org) Eating disorders
- [www.edap.org](http://www.edap.org) – Eating disorders
- [Edreferral.com](http://Edreferral.com) – Eating disorders
- [www.tcme.org](http://www.tcme.org) – The Center for Mindful Eating
- [www.mindfuleating.org](http://www.mindfuleating.org)
- [www.normaleating.com](http://www.normaleating.com)

□ Let's Get Cooking!

