

Coping, Food and Emotions

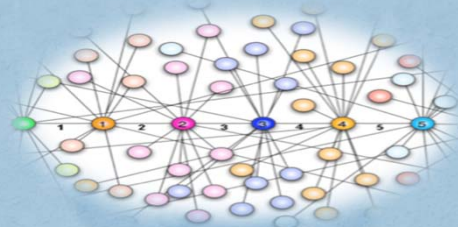
By Darcy Holladay, BS, MA, LPC

Emotions Can Seem Overwhelming



SOMETIMES WE DO THINGS TO COPE WITH EMOTIONS THAT ARE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

- Eating Too Much or Emotional Eating
- Drinking Too Much
- Getting into Fights with Friends and Family
- Being Impulsive



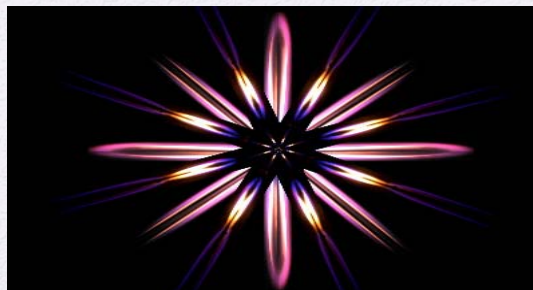
As Humans, We Have
Survived Because We Are
Good at Connecting Current
Situations & Emotions With
Past Feelings & Situations.

As a Result,
We Quickly
Become
Flooded
With
Emotion



WHAT IS THE KEY TO AVOIDING COMMON PITFALLS?

- Learn to recognize the triggers of our emotional cycles and utilize tools in order to stop the progress of the cycle.



Stage I: Triggers

The Spark That Ignites

- Come in many forms.
- Emotional eating and alcohol use is both chemical and emotional, and because of this the triggers can be more difficult to recognize.
- The strength of the trigger comes from our personal history.
- Some triggers may be more sensitive than others and more difficult to control the reaction.

Chemical Triggers

- Low blood sugar, usually due to waiting too long between meals.
- Eating too many *refined* carbohydrates not paired with proteins and fats:
 - This leads to large fluctuations in blood sugar and
 - A greater desire to consume even more refined carbohydrates!
- Dieting! This can produce a stress response and feelings of deprivation.
- High Risk Foods: High sugar or High fat
- High Risk Situations: Parties or Buffets
- Alcohol: Lowers inhibitions and lowers blood sugar

Emotional Triggers

- Loneliness
- Rejection
- Failure
- Not being heard
- Loss (Freedom or Relationship)
- Frustration
- Feeling Inadequate

Stage 2: “Poor Me” Making Connections

- “I never get to eat what I want.”
- “Why can’t I just eat the way _____ does?”
- I shouldn’t have to diet!”
- “Loosing weight is too hard!”
- “I always have to work harder than everyone else!”
- “No one ever listens to me!”
- “No one cares about me!”

Stage 3: Hopelessness

Rattled With Thought Distortions

- “Things are never going to change!”
- “It doesn’t matter what I do!”
- “I will never be able to loose weight!”
- “Why bother?”
- “Who cares!”
- “No one is ever going to understand!”
- “I can’t change it, so why try?”

Stage 4: Isolation

- Presents in Different Ways:
 - Walking away from others
 - Being difficult to be around
 - Withdrawing into your mind or being very quiet and detached
 - Keeping secrets
 - Isolating from others



Stage 5: Anger “Who Is To Blame?”

- Anger In:

Depression, self-blame,
criticism and emotional abuse



- Anger Out:

Sarcasm, being edgy, short and irritable,
verbal, emotional and physical abuse

Stage 6: Fantasy

“What is Going To Make This Better?”

- A Draw to Carbohydrates: Release of feel good neurotransmitters, Serotonin and Dopamine
- Food Memories: Mom’s chocolate chip cookies, a favorite meal growing up
- Ice Cream: Mother’s Milk: Combination of Dairy and Fat
- Emotional Fantasy: “I’m going to tell them what is on my mind!”

Stage 7: Planning

“How am I going to do it?”

- Food Routines:

Eating Standing up in the kitchen

Cuddling up with some ice-cream on the couch to a favorite TV-show.

Going by a favorite bakery on the way home.

Messages:

“I’ll have one cookie and then I will put them away.”

Stage 8: Decision To Act

Squashing the second-guessing

- “I’m celebrating!”
- “Of course, I should have dessert!”
- “It is worth it!”
- “It is not that big a deal!”
- “It will make me feel so much better!”

Stage 9: The Act

- Overeating or binge eating
- Drinking too much
- Getting into fights with people we care about
- Being impulsive



Stage 10: Guilt/Anxiety “What did I just do?”

- “Why did I just do that?”
- “I can’t believe that I just ate the whole thing!”
- “Why couldn’t I hold it together?”
- “I just blew my whole diet!”

Stage 11: Promises

- “I am starting a diet on Monday, and that was my last hurrah!”
- “I will go to the gym tomorrow and burn off all of that food.”
- “I won’t buy ____ anymore.”
- “I will be more disciplined next time!”
- “Things will not get so out of control next time.”

Stage 12: Denial

- “I have things under control now.”
- “That was a long-time ago.”
- “It was only that one time.”
- “It is not a big deal.”
- “I was having a really bad day.”
- “Everyone does it.”

Now What?

- Take stock of the common and uncommon emotions. Sometimes we have a really hard time acknowledging particular emotions and be take extra effort to cover them up.
- Connect with our body. Most of the stages of our cycle involve distorted thinking. We want to disrupt the cycle before it picks up steam.

Grounding

- Grounding teaches you to stop losing touch with the present moment by concentrating and focusing on the present or by directing your attention to something else.



LET'S TRY IT!

- 1st: Look around for five things that you **See** and name them—out loud if possible. Name specific things, in detail, as you see them. For example, “I see a shiny blue plastic water bottle”; “I see a red and blue water color painting,” and so on.
- 2nd: Name five things that you can **Hear**. For example, humming of a fan, cars passing by, and the dishwasher running, and so on.
- 3rd: Name five things that you can **Feel**. These are not emotional feelings, but physical sensations. For example, “I feel jeans against the skin of my left thigh”; “I feel the soles of my feet on the floor,” and so forth.

If you get stumped, it is OK to repeat things, just concentrate on actually *sensing* them in the present.

Coping Skills: Self Soothing

Create a happy place in your mind and develop means to sooth yourself in a healthy meaningful way.

- **Touch**: A blanket, pet, favorite pair of pants or t-shirt, warm bath, petting a pet, warm bath, washing your hands
- **Smell**: A fragrant candle, a certain fragrance, flowers, a comforting person, rain, herbal tea.
- **Sound**: Music, someone’s voice, the ocean, thunderstorms, rain, birds, a sound machine.
- **Sight**: Nature scenes, particular colors, picture or a happy time, a favorite pet, picture of someone, birds, etc.

