

Emotional eating is consuming food for reasons other than physical hunger. Humans are social beings and food plays a large role in celebrations and holidays. This is normal and enjoyable. Emotional eating becomes problematic when people eat for reasons such as stress, boredom, sadness or loneliness. Triggers for emotional eating are not always negative. Some people eat when they feel happy or excited.

People who eat for emotional reasons often experience feelings of guilt or failure after overeating. Emotional eating can interfere with weight management, setting off a destructive cycle of overeating and dieting. To take control of emotional eating, you'll need to identify emotional eating patterns and devise strategies to overcome trigger situations.

Identifying Patterns

The best way to identify eating for emotional reasons is to keep a food journal. Use the "5 W's" method: Who you were with? What did you eat? When did you eat? Where did you eat? Why did you eat?

Note how you were feeling and how much was eaten as well. Identifying emotional eating triggers will help you develop strategies to overcome destructive behaviors.

Tips for Overcoming Emotional Eating

- > Identify and recognize times of negative and self-defeating statements such as, "I can't do this" or "I failed." Replace those statements with positive comments such as, "This is hard but it will be worth it" and "I will learn and make a better choice next time."
- > Before reaching for food, rate your hunger from 1 to 10, 10 being ravenous. For ratings of 5 or less, eat an apple. If you are not hungry enough to eat an apple, emotions are probably driving the urge to eat. Food will not satisfy a person eating for emotional reasons. Look for other positive and productive ways to address the issues.
- > Find alternatives to eating to help you deal with stress. Go for a walk, read a book, listen to music or do deep breathing exercises.
- > Try the three-bite rule. The most pleasure comes from the first three bites of food. After that, senses become dulled. Take three bites of your favorite indulgent foods and focus on fully enjoying them.
- > Chewing a strong mint gum, breath mint or brushing teeth right after a meal may deter the urge to go for seconds or dessert.
- > Aim for progress, not perfection. Expect ups and downs; they are part of the learning process. Remain focused and celebrate your successes. Every small victory is a step closer to obtaining your goal.

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