

NUTRITION INFORMATION FROM YOUR DIETITIAN

## Emotional Eating: The ways we eat our feelings

Dealing with emotions can be confusing and often difficult. Sometimes we use food as a way to cope when dealing with difficult feelings. This may comfort or distract us from our emotions for the moment. But, this may be getting in the way of our goals to lose weight and prevent type 2 diabetes.

**Emotional eating doesn't just happen. It's triggered by unwanted or uncomfortable feelings that we don't know how to deal with or want to deal with.** The first step in dealing with emotional eating is to recognize our triggers.

### Common emotional eating triggers

There are several types of emotional eating triggers, and these triggers may cause you to overeat in different ways. The following lists the most common emotional triggers and has examples on how to change eating habits.

*Here is a list of some common triggers for emotional eating*

Stress	Reward	Bribery
Loneliness	Boredom	Sadness
Frustration	Depression	Nervousness
Anger	Anxiety	Spite

If you can recognize and identify your triggers, you can create solutions to help avoid emotional eating. Use the spaces below to identify your triggers or write solutions for your triggers in order to avoid emotional eating.

**Eating for distraction:** This is simply **eating for pleasure and enjoyment**. It's the mildest and most common form of emotional eating. Enjoying your food is a part of healthy eating and is an important principle of intuitive eating. However, using your senses (sight, smell, sound of food) alone to decide whether to eat or not can often cause you to think you are hungry when perhaps you are not. Eating for sensory gratification when not physically hungry can easily lead to overeating.

My solutions for avoiding overeating for sensory gratification include:

1. Drink a glass of water and wait 15 minutes to see if I'm still hungry.
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### *How does emotionally eating help me?*

- It tastes good
- It is exciting
- It is reliable, and it is always there
- It keeps me from feeling lonely or bored
- It soothes me
- It numbs my negative feelings

### *How does emotionally eating hurt me?*

- It makes me overweight
- It causes my clothes to not fit
- It makes me feel uncomfortable when I exercise
- It raises my cholesterol level
- It numbs me to the joys of life



This handout is meant for use during an appointment with a registered dietitian only and is not intended for use by other clinicians.

**Eating for comfort:** This means eating foods that cause you to feel good or remember a comfortable time or place. These are often called comfort foods. These foods can be a part of healthy eating as long as you stay in touch with your hunger and fullness signals and choose appropriate portions.

Some of my comfort foods and why they comfort me include:

1. Turkey dinner. Makes me remember Thanksgiving at Grandma's.
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Eating for distraction:** This means using food to distract you from unwanted feelings. Eating for distraction can block your ability to detect your physical feelings of hunger. It only provides a temporary relief, and can prevent you from finding and fixing the real source of your feelings.

Some situations when I use food to distract myself from my feelings include:

1. I eat out at work to distract myself from the problems at my job.
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Eating for sedation:** This is when you use food to numb your feelings. Eating to cope with emotions can turn into an addictive pattern. It's similar to the reasons people use drugs and alcohol.

If you identify often with this type of emotional eating, it may be a sign that you need some additional mental health assistance. Please ask your dietitian for more information and possibly a referral.

Some situations when I use food for sedation include:

1. When I think of money, I go to the fridge and get a snack to eat.
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Eating for punishment:** Guilt makes us feel like we need to punish ourselves, and food is often used as punishment. This type of emotional eating has no pleasure and is often done with force and anger.

Some situations when I use food for punishment include:

1. I hate being overweight, and I punish myself by eating even more!
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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## Your Action Plan

### What are you ready to do?

After identifying times when you emotionally eat (see section on left), decide how you will better cope with emotions in the future. Here are some ideas:

**Nurture** yourself by reaching out to a friend, spouse, or counselor. Engage in nurturing activities such as yoga, massage, walking, or taking a nap.

**Distract** yourself by reading, watching a movie, dancing, creating art, or providing service to others.

**Deal** with your feeling directly by calling a friend, crying, meditating, or journaling.

What is your strategy to manage emotions without using food?

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