

## Emotional Eating

Emotional eating is eating influenced by positive or negative feelings. A person's feelings can affect many parts of their eating habits such as:

- Why they eat
- What food they choose
- Where they eat and with whom
- How fast or slow they eat
- How much they eat

*If you have any questions, ask your care team.*

### Reasons for emotional eating

Emotional eating can happen because of many different kinds of emotions. Often, people who eat for emotional reasons may be using food to self-soothe or find short relief from difficult feelings. Difficult feelings can include stress, sadness, worry, boredom, loneliness and anger.

People also may eat for reasons related to celebrations. We may try to increase our happy feelings of the experience with foods we like (example: eating candy and popcorn at the movie theater). We may eat different kinds or amounts of food when we celebrate as we did in childhood.

Many people may learn to use food as a way to change how they feel. This can be when they are feeling physically or emotionally unwell. Or they may use food to celebrate achievements and reward "good" behavior.

In these ways, feelings (not physical hunger) can cause overeating.

### Cost of emotional eating

The benefit of the better mood you get from emotional eating is short-lived.

Over time, using food to deal with feelings can lead to weight gain. Excessive weight gain is linked to many health problems, such as high blood pressure and diabetes. It can also lead to other emotions like guilt and shame.

Emotional eating to cope with problems does not allow a person to use more adaptive coping skills. It potentially blocks the development of healthier coping mechanisms.

## Help yourself curb emotional eating

There are things you can try to help stop emotional eating. Here are some helpful tips.

- Identify your triggers. This may be specific foods in your environment, situations you face or emotional experiences that make you want to eat for non-hunger related reasons.
- Learn to know the difference between true (physical) and emotional hunger.
- Have a realistic understanding of what eating for comfort is doing to you in the long term when you have strong emotions.
- Learn to cope with strong emotions in a healthier way.
- Observe and describe your emotions with a sense of curiosity and non-judgment.
- Practice sitting with and letting yourself feel difficult emotions.
- Practice self-compassion (kindness with yourself).
- Remove the foods you are most likely to eat for emotional reasons from your environment (home, work, car).
- Create a list of other activities you can do instead of emotional eating. Choose active hobbies that are in line with your goals and values, and are realistic. Find activities that will not allow you to eat while doing them.
- Schedule an appointment with a mental health professional if you need more support.

Your care team is here to support you in your weight loss journey. If you have any other questions about emotional eating, please ask your physician.

## Emotional Eating Worksheet

Use this worksheet to track your emotional eating. Think about actions that you can use to cope in a better way.

Situation/stressor	Emotional reaction (such as stress, low mood, boredom)	Function of eating (such as comfort, stimulation, time-filler, distraction)	Better coping skills (such as exercise, relaxation)
<i>Fight with my partner</i>	<i>Anger, frustration</i>	<i>To numb out and escape the emotional discomfort</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Take a time out to go for a walk or listen to music.</i></li> <li>• <i>Communicate concerns and problem-solve with my partner.</i></li> <li>• <i>Try deep breathing from my diaphragm.</i></li> </ul>