

# EMOTIONS & Eating

People eat for many reasons. Other than simply being hungry, people may eat when they're stressed, happy, sad, or bored. Eating based on emotions instead of when you're really hungry can make it hard to reach and keep a healthy body weight. Emotional eating makes it hard to respond to your body's natural cues to stop eating and can spoil your plans to eat better for your health.

Emotional eating can lead to an unhealthy cycle: your emotions influence you to overeat, you feel guilty for overeating, and your guilt makes you overeat again.

You can gain control over emotional eating and keep your health on track by following these tips:



- **Deal with stress.** Know when you're stressed out and try to figure out how you can deal with it. Eating may distract you from whatever is stressing you out in the short term, but relief from stress will only come from dealing with the actual issue.
- **Deal with boredom.** To stop eating when you're not hungry, keep yourself busy by doing other things. Go for a walk, read a book, or call a friend.
- **Know the difference between appetite and hunger.** Appetite is the desire to eat. You can have an appetite simply by seeing, smelling, or thinking about food. On the other hand, when you're hungry, your body sends signals like stomach growls to let you know that you need food. It's important to pay attention to your body's signals of hunger and learn to control your appetite.
- **Learn when to stop eating.** Eat slowly and don't wait until you feel really full before you stop eating. It takes about 20 minutes for your stomach to let your brain know that it's full. Enjoy your meals and take breaks so you don't overeat. Keep eating until you feel pleasantly full, not until your plate is clean!
- **Social eating.** It can be harder to make healthy choices when you're eating out with family or friends. Try to balance your choices to include healthier options. For example, get a side salad with your burger instead of fries. Restaurants usually give big portions, so one way to control how much you eat is to share a meal with someone. Every now and then, it's ok to enjoy foods that aren't as healthy, but it will become a problem when unhealthy eating becomes a pattern.
- **Ditch the junk food.** People who eat emotionally often eat foods with little nutritional value that are high in fat, sugar, or salt. It's simple: you can't eat junk food if you don't have it in the house. Instead, keep a good supply of healthy snack foods on hand, like fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, whole grain cereal, or lower fat yogurt.
- **Keep a food diary.** Don't just write down what you eat, but also write down what emotions you're feeling at the time. This may help you uncover patterns of emotional eating.

**Emotional eating may be more of a challenge in social situations, so your success also depends on support from your family and friends. Share your goals around healthy eating with them because family and friends can help you stay on track.**

## Key References:

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