

# FOOD *AND* THOUGHT

March 2024



A lifestyle approach to improving mood and wellbeing

"LET THY FOOD BE THY MEDICINE AND THY MEDICINE BE THY FOOD."

HIPPOCRATES

## The Food-Feeling Connection: Emotional Eating and Your Health

The challenges of daily life can, at times, leave us all feeling tired, stressed and overwhelmed. In response to some of these emotions, you may find yourself seeking comfort in food. This manner of coping with difficult emotions is called **Emotional Eating**. Because this type of eating is not the result of hunger, it is common to eat a lot more calories than our bodies need or will use, and we often gravitate towards food that are high in fat, sugar and salt. While these types of foods may be more appealing when you are feeling stress, are in a bad mood, or feel bad about yourself, the satisfaction they provide is short-lived. In fact, these types of high fat, high sugar foods may leave you feeling worse than before, and can have negative and long-lasting effects on your physical and emotional health and well-being.

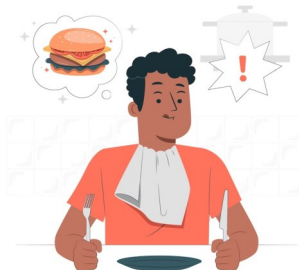


### Recognizing Emotional Eating

Everyone has bad days, but not everyone uses food to get through them. Some behaviors and thought patterns can increase your chance of becoming an emotional eater. Some risk factors include:

- Difficulty managing your emotions.
- Poor body image; being unhappy with your body.
- Dieting and/or feeling deprived of foods.

Emotional eating often becomes a habit. If you use food to self-soothe difficult emotions, you will be more likely to crave the same (unhealthy) foods the next time you are feeling bad. This happens because when you eat foods you enjoy, you stimulate the feel-good centers in your brain, triggering you to eat even more. This makes it more difficult to resist the temptation of unhealthy choices in the future, thus setting up a pattern of unhealthy eating.



Sources: <https://www.mountsinai.org/health-library/special-topic/break-the-bonds-of-emotional-eating>; <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/heres-the-deal-with-your-junk-food-cravings>

### Breaking the Pattern of Emotional Eating

Emotional eating is a learned behavior that can be unlearned through awareness and attention to your stress management habits. The first step in stopping the pattern of emotional eating is to recognize when it is happening. With this awareness you can take steps to make different choices when the urge to emotional eat appears.

1. Do something else when the urge appears; take a walk, call a friend, engage in an activity you enjoy or are good at.
2. Know your strengths; take note of your successes and things you are good at.
3. Plan ahead; Do not go hungry. When you are both hungry and stressed, pizza and other fast foods become **much** more tempting.
4. Make comfort food healthier. Prepare your favorite dishes with fewer calories.

#### Are you an Emotional Eater?

- Do you eat when you feel angry, depressed, hurt, or otherwise upset?
- Do you eat in response to certain people or situations?
- Do certain places or times of day trigger food cravings?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have a tendency toward emotional eating. Speak with your health professional about additional ways to manage this behavior.

The Food and Thought Program works to promote awareness and provide short term counselling around the important link between nutrition and emotional health. For more information or for a referral to the program, please contact the Food and Thought Program at 781-599-0110.

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