

Emotional eating



Do you ever reach for food when you're angry? Nervous? Stressed? Bored? Happy?

Emotional eating means eating to deal with situations or feelings instead of eating to satisfy true hunger.

Regularly eating to avoid feelings or to deal with tough situations can get in the way of your weight loss goals. It causes you to eat more than you need to eat. It may lead to feeling angry or disappointed with yourself, as well.

Good news, though—once you recognize emotional eating, you can:

1. Learn and practice strategies to prevent emotional eating.
2. Figure out how to deal with the causes (the feelings and situations) of emotional eating.



Did you know emotional eating occurs more often in people who struggle with their weight? Experts estimate that about 75 percent of overeating is related to emotional eating — meaning most of us have used food to cope with emotions.

Do you eat emotionally?

Do you eat when you...

Feel stressed?

Yes No

Are bored or have nothing else to do?

Yes No

Feel tired?

Yes No

Want a reward?

Yes No

Avoid doing something else?

Yes No

Aren't truly hungry?

Yes No

Feel down, lonely or depressed?

Yes No

Keep your answers in mind while reading about strategies to avoid emotional eating, on the next page.

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Strategies to prevent emotional eating

You can overcome emotional eating. By learning strategies to manage emotional eating now, you will be better able to tackle emotional challenges that lie ahead. Remember to work with your coach to come up with ideas that are right for you.

Track what, when and why you're eating.

Write down what you eat and how you feel while eating. This can be really hard, but using a food journal will help you be aware of the situations and feelings that trigger emotional eating.

Keep it out of sight.

"Out of sight" can really mean "out of mind." Your brain can trigger a craving for the food you see, so keep "trigger" foods out of the house and away from your desk.

Distract yourself.

Make a list of ways to distract yourself. Examples: chatting with a family member, calling a friend, playing cards or a board game, walking the dog, or practicing deep breathing.

Eat regularly.

Plan consistent meal times each day, no more than six hours apart, to prevent overeating later. Your body will adjust to set meal times and your hunger cues will likely follow this pattern. If needed, try eating in only one spot, such as the dinner table.

Plan ahead.

When you're hungry and in a hurry, it's often easier to grab "convenience" foods. Plan your groceries for the week, and your meals the day before. Keep good-for-you choices around to prevent impulsive choices.

Eat slowly.

Eat slowly to feel satisfied. It takes 15–20 minutes for your body to get the message that you've been fed. Practice eating until you're no longer hungry, not until you're stuffed.

Sleep.

Lack of sleep can lead to feeling more hungry or thirsty. Aim for 7 to 8 hours per night to help you fight the urge to eat. Talk to your coach about strategies for better sleep.

Next step

Track what, when, and why you eat for three days.

What triggers cause you to eat emotionally?

How can you avoid your triggers?

How can you start overcoming emotional eating?