



Lesson 8

The Ups and Downs of Emotional Eating

There is a strong relationship between your mood and what you choose or do not choose to eat, hence the term “comfort food.” However, eating in response to emotions rather than physical hunger can lead to overeating, obesity, and even other health issues down the road.

Know triggers . . . no surprises

Various factors contribute to emotional eating and different triggers exist for different people. Common triggers are stress, fear, anxiety, tension, worries, and hurt feelings. In these situations, food is often used to eliminate undesirable feelings.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with eating a snack to make you feel better; however, when food is used as a way to avoid or escape certain emotions, it can become easier to not deal with the real issue at hand. Food can also be used for those “feel good” moments, too. Although emotional eating is commonly associated with negative emotions, feelings of joy and excitement can elicit similar behaviors. How many times have you eaten during a celebratory event (weddings, parties, graduations, promotions, etc.) because food was available and you were being sociable, but you were not physically hungry? There is nothing wrong with eating in social gatherings, but if you make a habit of eating when you are not physically hungry, that behavior could lead to unwanted weight gain.

Use the chart on the back page to help you identify emotions that cause you to eat when you are not physically hungry. In the space below, write those emotions and the foods you typically eat when you feel that way.



<i>My personal triggers</i>	<i>Foods typically eaten</i>

Additional information from K-State Research and Extension Human Nutrition can be found at www.ksre.ksu.edu/humannutrition

Eating in response to physical hunger is a healthy behavior, but it is important to be aware of both physical and emotional hunger so you can respond appropriately.

Physical hunger	Emotional hunger
Builds gradually over time	Occurs suddenly and instantaneously
Produces a sensation of emptiness in the stomach (growling, rumbling)	Craves specific food items
Occurs several hours after the last meal	Is independent of time
Disappears when satisfied or full	Creates a desire to eat more despite fullness
Leads to eating for physical satisfaction	Leads to eating to satisfy a craving

Alternative responses to emotion

Food is not the only option. There are other ways to relieve stress, escape boredom, and celebrate that do not include eating. You will not feel as guilty indulging in a great book as you might after consuming half a bag of Doritos.

- Call an old friend to catch up.
- Enjoy the weather if it's nice. Take a walk or relax and listen to uplifting music.
- Play a board game with your kids.
- Organize a get-together with your neighbors that doesn't revolve around food.
- Celebrate life's successes by granting yourself "me" time. Do whatever it is that you love.
- If you like animals, go to the pet store. Nothing can put a smile on your face faster than playing with a cute kitten or puppy.
- Curl up with a good book or favorite movie.
- Physical activity is a great stress reliever.

Release your inner yogi

Since stress is one of the most common triggers for emotional eating, why not combat it with a little exercise? Physical activity is proven to relieve stress because it creates endorphins, which are the body's natural painkillers. A sudden surge in these endorphins is responsible for the natural high experienced after exercising.

If you're ready for a challenge and a little relaxation, try yoga. The goal of yoga is to unite the mind, body, and spirit through a combination of several stress-relieving techniques, including controlled breathing,



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stretching, and mental imagery. There are several types of yoga available — hatha, vinyasa, and ashtanga are just a few — so find the one that works best with your personal interests and goals. Many fitness centers, yoga clubs, and community groups offer sessions for every level, from beginner to advanced. If you are a first-timer and would rather take yoga for a test drive in the comfort of your own home, there are many excellent videos available for purchase or to check out from your local library.

Benefits of yoga include:

- reduced levels of cortisol (the stress hormone),
- lower blood pressure and heart rate,
- opportunity for spiritual growth if desired,
- sense of well-being,
- reduced anxiety and tension, and
- increased strength and flexibility.



My Move Into Health action plan

A large, empty light blue rectangular area intended for writing an action plan.



Emotions

Happy

Festive	Hopeful	Proud
Excited	Peaceful	Joyous
Enthusiastic	Glad	Pleased
Cheerful	Playful	
Lighthearted	Social	

Angry

Resentful	Irritated	Bitter
Enraged	Frustrated	Fuming
Angry	Guilty	Helpless
Panicked	Alarmed	
Insecure	Confused	

Anxious

Suspicious	Overbusy	Overhungry
Overwhelmed	Nervous	Fidgety
Afraid	Out of control	Impatient
Disheartened	Tired	Exhausted

Hurt

Injured	Grieved	Ashamed
In pain	Suffering	Crushed
Victimized	Heartbroken	

Sad

Disappointed	Pessimistic	Lonely
Unhappy	Gloomy	Sad
Depressed	Discouraged	Low
Moody	Blue	In the dumps
Rejected	Fearful	



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