

## Signs of Emotional Eating

Overeating is most likely to occur due to emotional eating. Our bodies simply aren't programmed to eat more than it requires for no reason. You may turn to food for comfort either consciously or unconsciously, when facing a difficult problem, stress or just looking to keep yourself occupied. Emotional eaters often eat to soothe negative feelings like stress, boredom, loneliness, anger, fatigue, anxiety, and/or sadness. Researchers estimate that 75% of “emotional eating” leads to overeating.

Although some people actually eat less in the face of strong emotions or stress, if you're in emotional distress you may turn to impulsive or binge eating without even realizing it. In fact, your emotions may become so tied to your eating habits that you automatically reach for a sweet treat whenever you're angry or stressed. You may not even realize you ate it. Food also serves as a distraction. If you're worried about an upcoming event or stewing over a conflict, for instance, you may focus on eating comfort food instead of dealing with the painful situation.

How do you know if you are an emotional eater? Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you eat without realizing you are putting food into your mouth?
2. When you feel stressed about an important project or emotional issue, do you dive into a package of cookies or candy (a treat)?
3. Do you feel guilty or ashamed after overeating or blowing your “diet” again?
4. Do you feel like you deserve a treat when do something good or need to celebrate?
5. Do you feel that your weight is spiraling out of control and you cannot stick to your plan?
6. Do you eat to procrastinate something that you do not want to do or seems difficult?
7. Do you need to feel stuffed to be satisfied?
8. Do you tend to overeat when you are fatigued because it is the only thing you have the energy to do or it is the quick fix?
9. Do you tend to overeat when you are alone, bored and lonely to entertain yourself?
10. Do you crave certain foods and feel like you “have to” have them?
11. Do you feel like you can't get what you REALLY want, so you “settle” for food?

These examples can trigger emotional eating, but you can take steps to control cravings and renew your effort at eating healthy and controlling your weight. To help stop emotional eating, try these tips:

- \* Tame your stress - If stress is a cause of your emotional eating, try a stress management technique, such as yoga, meditation or relaxation. Exercise is a perfect stress reducer and it removes you from the food source.
- \* Have a hunger reality check - Is your hunger physical, an emotional issue or thirst? If you ate just a few hours ago and don't have a rumbling stomach, you're probably not really hungry. Drink a glass of water and see if the feelings pass.
- \* Keep a food journal - Write down what you eat, how much you eat, when you eat, how you're feeling when you eat, and how hungry you are. Reviewing your journal can show you patterns that reveal the connection between mood and food.
- \* Get support - You're more likely to give in to emotional eating if you lack a good support network. Lean on family and friends or consider joining a support group.
- \* Fight boredom - Instead of snacking when you're not truly hungry, distract yourself. Take a walk, do a chore, play with your cat, walk your dog, listen to music, read, surf the Internet, play a game or call a friend.
- \* Take away temptation - Don't keep comfort foods in your home if they're hard for you to resist. (If you don't buy it, you can't eat it!) If you feel angry, stressed or depressed postpone your trip to the grocery store until you're sure that you have your emotions in check.
- \* Don't deprive yourself - If you are trying to lose weight, you maybe limiting your calories and food choices. By eating the same foods frequently, and banishing the treats you enjoy, you set yourself up for deprivation. This cycle can increase your food cravings, especially in response to emotions. Enjoy an occasional treat and get plenty of variety in your eating plan to help curb cravings.
- \* Snack healthy. If you feel the urge to eat between meals, choose a low-fat, low-calorie snack, such as fresh fruit, vegetables with fat-free dip, or unbuttered popcorn. Remember protein helps keep your blood sugar stable so by mixing protein, carbs and a healthy fat, you will stay satisfied longer.
- \* Get enough sleep. If you're always tired, you might eat more frequently to try to give yourself an energy boost. Take a nap or go to bed earlier instead.
- \* Seek therapy. If you've tried to stop emotional eating, but can't seem to get control of it, consider therapy with a professional mental health provider. Therapy sessions can help you understand the motivations behind your emotional eating and help you learn new coping skills. Therapy can also help you discover whether you may have an eating disorder, which is sometimes connected to emotional eating.

Source: <http://stress.about.com/od/unhealthybehaviors/a/eating.htm>