



# EMOTIONAL EATING

## EATING YOUR EMOTIONS

### IT'S COMPLICATED

Our relationship with food is a complicated one and begins from the moment we are born. A baby who is given milk to soothe her hunger experiences far more than just a happy tummy. Physical touch, connection, warmth, and comfort are immediately associated with mealtime. We quickly learn that food means more than just survival. It's also nurturance, safety, pleasure, and love.

This pattern continues as we grow. Tears and bruises are often treated with milk and cookies. Grandparents may show their love and affection through special meals and treats. Some of our fondest memories of holidays, birthdays, and other celebrations are built around food. Eating is a core part of our culture, identity, and emotional expression.



### HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM REALLY HUNGRY?

With so many connections around food, many people are not aware that the urge to eat may not be due to physical hunger, but rather emotional hunger. There are key differences that can help you recognize what you are experiencing.

#### Physical Hunger

- ✓ Comes on gradually
- ✓ Can wait
- ✓ Is open to options – many foods sound appealing
- ✓ Stops when you're full

Eating to satisfy physical hunger doesn't make you feel bad about yourself.



#### Emotional Hunger

- ✓ Comes on suddenly
- ✓ Needs to be satisfied instantly
- ✓ Craves specific comfort foods
- ✓ Isn't satisfied with a full stomach

Eating to satisfy emotional hunger triggers feelings of powerlessness, and shame.

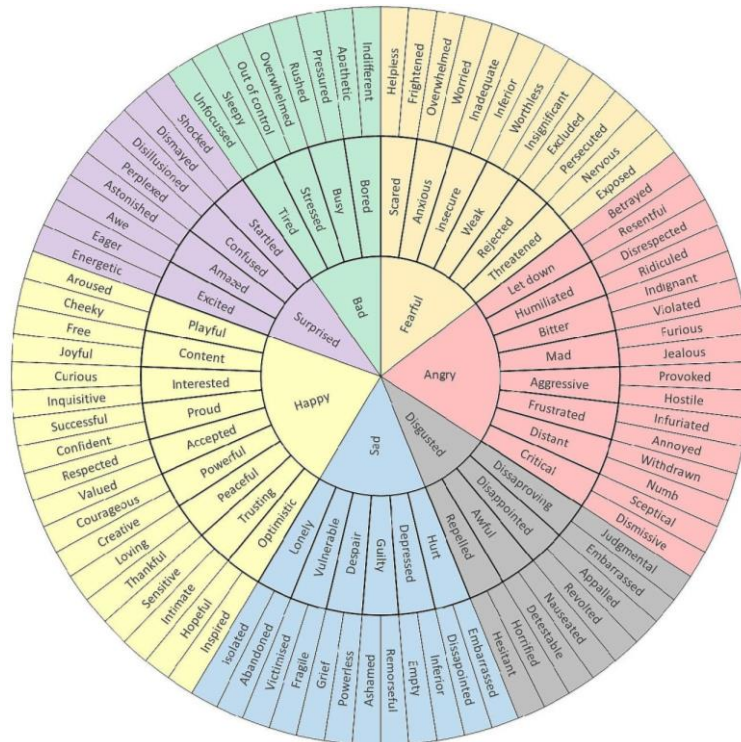
It can be helpful to ask, "am I hungry enough to eat a vegetable or piece of fruit?" If the answer is no, there is a good chance you are experiencing emotional hunger.

## GET A HANDLE ON YOUR EMOTIONS

We often eat to numb, distract, or escape uncomfortable emotions. We can begin to learn to deal with these feelings more effectively by developing an emotional vocabulary and allowing ourselves to sit with our emotions, before stuffing them down with food. When you find yourself wanting to eat, take a moment to first identify the emotion you are feeling. It might be helpful to use the Emotion Wheel developed by psychologist, Robert Plutchik.

### THE EMOTION WHEEL

The inside depicts 7 basic emotions, while the outside layers represent extensions of those emotions.



- 1 Name your emotion or find it on the wheel.
- 2 Pay attention to where you feel this emotion in your body. Every emotion has a physical sensation.
- 3 Practice sitting in a quiet place with these feelings for a few minutes. Continue to notice where you feel it in your body.
- 4 Breathe deeply and try to relax any areas of tension.

### WHAT'S EATING YOU?

Can you recognize some of the ways you use food to deal with your emotions?



#### Anxiety & Stress

Using food for relief or to calm yourself.



#### Reward or Bribery

"I finished my project. I deserve a piece of cake."



#### Fatigue

Using food to increase energy levels.



#### Boredom

Eating as something to do.



#### Depression

Using food to elevate your mood.



#### Procrastination

"I'll do that task after I eat something."



#### Excitement

Using food as something fun or to celebrate.



#### Loneliness

Using food as a friend or to fill an emptiness.



#### Frustration

Eating as a way to release anger.

Sources: The Intuitive Eating Workbook, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, 2017

<https://positivepsychology.com/emotion-wheel/>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/emotional-eating>

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