



# EMOTIONAL EATING

## TAKE BACK CONTROL

Food is a central part of the human experience and something that we associate with pleasure, comfort, celebration, and love. It's no wonder that approximately 40% of people will eat when under stress. Using food to self-soothe is something all of us do from time to time, but if it is one of your only coping strategies, it may be time to consider other alternatives.

### THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE

If we aren't paying attention to our personal needs or we neglect self-care, emotional eating can become an appealing way to reward ourselves. Food is one way to comfort and nurture yourself, but there are many other ways of doing so. Over the next week, take a daily inventory of how you attend to your needs. The point is not to check off every item, but rather to begin prioritizing and noticing other ways you can care for yourself.

Here's a checklist of things you can do to focus on you!

- Get at least 7 hours of sleep
- Eat 3 balanced meals daily
- Eat at least 5 vegetables daily
- Eat at least 3 fruits daily
- Move your body
- Spend time with family
- Spend time outdoors
- Take a bubble bath
- Write in a journal
- Learn a new skill or hobby
- Take regular breaks
- Listen to a podcast
- Watch something funny
- Try aromatherapy
- Call a friend
- Watch a movie
- Read a good book
- Meditate
- Write a gratitude list
- Get a massage
- Practice deep breathing
- Go to bed early
- Colour, paint, or draw
- Cuddle with a pet
- Treat yourself
- Stretch for 5 minutes
- Create an emotional support network

## WHAT DO I NEED?



The next time you find yourself about to eat something as a way to cope with a situation or feeling, step away from the food, go somewhere you won't be disturbed, and set a timer for 5 minutes. Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. As you relax, ask yourself:

- ① What is it I am feeling at this moment?
- ② What do I *really* need right now to help me cope with how I'm feeling?
- ③ How can I fulfill this need and address how I feel without turning to food?

Here are a few suggestions...

<b>Connection.</b> Schedule more time with friends and family.	<b>Nurturing.</b> Take a nap. Spend time painting or gardening.	<b>Pleasure.</b> Watch a movie. Read a good book. Buy yourself flowers.
<b>Space.</b> Spend an evening by yourself. Turn off your phone.	<b>Stress-Reduction.</b> Meditate, stretch, or practice yoga. Enjoy a bath or massage.	<b>Reward.</b> Treat yourself to a small gift. Book a weekend getaway.

## PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

- ① **Identify your triggers.** Pay attention when you find yourself at the drive-thru or rummaging through the fridge. Often, we aren't aware of the trigger. Maybe it was a fight with your spouse, a negative news story, or a looming deadline at work. Mindless eating can become a pattern and noticing our habits is the first step to changing them.
- ② **Develop your emotional vocabulary.** Once you identify your triggers, it's important to name the emotions that are linked. As soon as we can name what is going on from within, we can begin to gain control.
- ③ **Pause.** You have identified the trigger and the emotions that come with it. Before you act, take a few deep breaths, remove yourself from the food, and give yourself a chance to cool down. A few conscious breaths can help you make your next decision from a place of awareness rather than reactivity.
- ④ **Question.** Ask yourself what you *really* need. Most of the time, we realize the solution to our problem isn't at the bottom of an ice cream carton or inside a bag of chips. Instead, we are seeking to numb, distract, or avoid our feelings. If you're tired, try a nap. If you're bored, you may need more stimulation. Try exercise or an online game with friends.
- ⑤ **Practice self-care.** When we reach for food to soothe an emotional discomfort, we are trying to care for ourselves. We often know there are better ways to give ourselves what we need. Keep a list of self-care ideas. In moments of impulse, it's a helpful reminder.
- ⑥ **Let it go.** If you decide that food is what you want after all, then eat it, but choose to do so mindfully. Take the time to enjoy it, savour each bite, and then let it go.



Sources: The Intuitive Eating Workbook, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, 2017  
<https://www.healthline.com/health/emotional-eating>  
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