



# EMOTIONAL EATING

## EATING YOUR EMOTIONS

**Emotional Eating** is the desire or act of eating driven by a feeling or emotion rather than physical hunger. It is often something we do impulsively and without much awareness.

### Why do we do it?

We never do anything without a good reason. In times of stress, our brain releases the hormone, cortisol, to help our bodies prepare for fight or flight. Many foods will produce feel-good neurotransmitters by activating our brain's reward system, causing us to feel better in the moment. Our brains are especially primed to crave sweet and fatty foods because before the advent of process foods, these high-caloric foods were necessary for survival.



### Our Relationship with Food

This relationship begins as soon as we are born. A baby given milk experiences warmth, safety, and connection with her mother. As children, we are given treats to help comfort us when we are upset. These powerful associations with food are formed immediately in our brains. Think about all the celebrations, occasions and holidays that centre around food. Food represents many things to us, including connection, pleasure, belonging, security, and love.

## Physical Hunger vs Emotional Hunger – Know the Difference!

### 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.

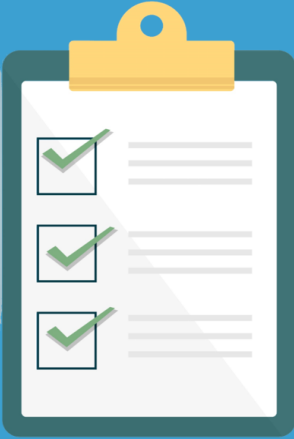
## Identify Emotional Triggers

Developing an emotional vocabulary can help us address **what** causes us to reach for food. Food can act like a friend, fill time, distract us, numb us, and calm us down. Try putting a name to the emotion you feel before you turn to food. Ask yourself, am I lonely and looking for comfort? Am I angry and needing a release? Am I bored and looking for a distraction? **Awareness** is the first step in changing your habits!



#### REMEMBER...

Emotional eating is an attempt at self-care. It gives us temporary feelings of control. While it's normal to turn to food in times of stress, it should not be your only coping mechanism!



## Self-Care Ideas

- ✓ Find an activity you can get lost in : read, watch a movie, do a puzzle
- ✓ Reach out to a friend or family member
- ✓ Move your body. Go for a walk, dance, try a microburst
- ✓ Practice meditation or deep breathing
- ✓ Get creative: paint, draw, dance, colour
- ✓ Start a journal to record thoughts, goals, or things you're thankful for

### Take a Time-Out

Before you reach for food, take a few minutes to recognize your emotional needs. Here are two approaches that you can take to better understand what you need.

## Reflect

Learn to sit with your feelings and communicate with yourself. It can be helpful to ask yourself:

- 1 What am I **feeling** right now?
- 2 What is it that I **really need** in this moment?
- 3 How can I **fulfill** this need without food?

Take the time to listen to yourself and understand how you are feeling and what you need. You may find that the answers really have nothing to do with food at all!

## Be Mindful





Find a quiet place to sit. Close your eyes and be present with your thoughts and feelings

**Investigate.** Get curious about what's going on in your mind and body. How does it feel?

**Be with your emotions.** Observe emotions without judgement. Don't try to change them. They will pass.

**Live in the moment.** Focus on an anchor (your breath or a sound in the room) when your mind wanders.

## Self-Care Evaluation

<p>Consider the following aspects of your life. Are you satisfied with them? For each, choose the emoji that best explains your level of satisfaction. Then, consider the questions to understand where improvements may be possible.</p>	<p><b>Amount and quality of sleep</b></p> <p><i>How much sleep do you get each night? Do you wake up feeling rested and refreshed?</i></p>	
	<p><b>Work-life balance</b></p> <p><i>What are some of your favourite activities and hobbies? How much time do you spend doing them each week?</i></p>	
	<p><b>Physical activity</b></p> <p><i>How much time do you exercise each week?</i></p>	
	<p><b>Dietary habits</b></p> <p><i>Are you eating balanced meals that keep you satisfied for 2-3 hours? Do you eat 7-10 servings of fruits and vegetables, and 2-3 servings of protein?</i></p>	

Sources: The Intuitive Eating Workbook, Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, 2017, Images by Freepik.com