



BREAKING FREE FROM EMOTIONAL EATING: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Many of us have struggled with emotional eating for a long time, which means that learning new patterns of self-care will take time and patience. This guide shares seven strategies to use to begin your journey of finding new ways to relate to yourself, and better cope with the inevitable ups and downs of life.



IDENTIFY PATTERNS

In a notebook or journal, describe your emotional eating patterns. When do you tend to emotionally eat? (e.g., when you're feeling stressed, bored, sad, lonely, celebrating, etc.)

Then, identify your triggers: What situations, emotions, or events often lead to emotional eating for you?



BUILD AWARENESS

Create a food and mood journal: Record what you eat and how you feel before and after each meal or snack. Take note of any emotional triggers and patterns you notice. This self-awareness helps you gain insight into your emotional eating habits, making it easier to address them.

Rate hunger and emotions: Before eating, rate your physical hunger on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being ravenous, 10 being overly full). Also, rate your emotional state on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being very negative, 10 being very positive).



DEVELOP HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES

List alternative coping mechanisms: Brainstorm healthy activities or techniques that can replace emotional eating when cravings arise - such as exercise, calling a friend, deep breathing, journaling, reading, doing a puzzle, etc. Engaging in these activities can replace emotional eating as a means of coping.

Create a "Feel-Good" List: Make a list of non-food-related activities that bring you joy, comfort, or relaxation. Refer to this list when you feel the urge to emotionally eat. A few ideas here: take a bath, go for a walk, read a magazine, or call a friend or family member you enjoy.

Have Healthy Alternatives Available: Stock up on nutritious and satisfying snacks like fruits, veggies, nuts, or yogurt. When a craving strikes, opt for these choices instead of indulging.

Don't Get Too Hungry: Weight management expert Dr. Shahebina Walji tells all of her patients who struggle with emotional eating to make sure they're eating enough throughout the day to avoid feeling deprived or being really hungry in the afternoon or before dinner. Take a look at your food journal – are you eating enough during the day?

Delay Gratification: When a craving is intense, challenge yourself to wait for 10-15 minutes before giving in. Often, the craving will weaken or pass during this time.



PRACTICE MINDFUL EATING

Practice mindful eating: During meals, pay attention to the taste, texture, and aroma of your food. Eat slowly, savoring each bite, and check in with your hunger and fullness cues.

Stop and assess: Before giving in to a craving, take a moment to pause and ask yourself if you are physically hungry, or if it feels more like an emotional craving.



BUILD A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Seek medical help: There are medical treatments that can really help with emotional eating, cravings, and “food noise” (obsessive or intrusive thoughts about food & eating). Speak with your doctor about the available options and what might be right for you.

Develop a support network: List friends, family members, or support groups you can reach out to when you need encouragement or accountability.

Share your goals: Talk to someone you trust about your emotional eating management journey, and discuss how they can support you.



REFLECT AND ADJUST

Review your journal: Periodically review your food and mood journal to identify progress, challenges, and patterns.

Adjust your strategies: Based on your reflections, make adjustments to your coping mechanisms and strategies for managing emotional eating.



CELEBRATE PROGRESS

Be kind to yourself: Remember that overcoming emotional eating takes time and effort. Celebrate your successes, no matter how small, and practice self-compassion throughout your journey.

Set realistic goals: Establish achievable, doable goals for managing emotional eating and track your progress. Celebrate each milestone as you work towards a healthier relationship with food and emotions.

Remember, managing emotional eating is a process. If you're having a hard time trying to manage it on your own, seeking professional help or support is the right next step.