

Put a stop to emotional eating — for good!

Knowing and understanding when and why you're eating for emotional reasons rather than hunger is a good starting to putting a stop to this unhealthy habit. You'll need to do some soul searching, but the outcome will be well worth the effort!

Step One:

Print this chart and keep it on your fridge or kitchen cupboard. Every time you eat, make a note of what you ate, when and why.

Step Two:

Review the table for patterns after one week. Then follow the strategies and tips on the back of this card.

Step Three:

Repeat Steps 1 and 2 until you feel you have more control over your eating.

Date	Time	Food or meal	Reason for eating (hunger or name a specific emotion)	Trigger (cause of emotional eating)
Sample day	9:30 pm	Chips and soft drink	Nothing good to watch on TV	Boredom
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

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Take action against emotional eating

Once you've tracked your eating habits for at least a week, review your journal for patterns — recurring emotions, danger times and triggers.

Spot your patterns

Some common emotional reasons for overeating include anger, boredom, loneliness, despair, stress and frustration. Whenever you can, try to uncover the trigger, or root cause, of these or other emotions.

For example, you might notice that you often eat potato chips while watching TV at night because you are bored. Or you may overeat at weekend meals because you're angry that your partner doesn't help with the chores.

These patterns will point to strategies that will help you combat your emotional eating. For example, try reading or booking a social engagement one night a week; tell your partner that you need to divide the housework work.

Three important questions

To keep emotional eating in check, always ask yourself these three questions before you reach for food:

1. Are you physically hungry or emotionally hungry? Learn to recognize the signs and feelings of true physical hunger, and eat only when you experience them.
2. Are you actually thirsty rather than hungry? We often confuse the two. Try drinking a glass of water or a cup of tea and then reassess.
3. Have you given your body enough time after eating to register that it's full? Wait 15 minutes before taking that second helping.

Start new habits

Using the information logged in your journal, try tailoring the following suggested strategies to your situation:

- Take time out to really understand your emotions — what you are feeling and why — instead of ignoring them or expressing them through food.
- Do something constructive to tackle the root cause of each emotion that leads to overeating. For example, grab a book from the library if you are bored; make a to-do list if you are overwhelmed by work; write a letter or email to a far-away friend if you are lonely; tell your partner why you are angry at him or her.
- Turn a negative response — overeating or overindulging in nutrition-poor foods — into a positive habit, such as going for a walk or dancing around the house.
- Treat yourself to a non-food reward when stress, worry or overwork get you down.
- Create an eating plan, with regular meals and snacks, that won't leave you hungry and vulnerable to emotional eating.
- Keep only healthy, nutritious foods in the pantry.
- Ensure that you are getting adequate sleep so you'll be better able to manage emotions and stress.