

STOP Feeding Your Feelings

DON'T LET EMOTIONAL EATING WEIGH YOU DOWN

If you run to the fridge to soothe pangs that have nothing to do with hunger, you could be an emotional eater. Studies show that both negative and positive emotions can trigger eating and overeating. Allowing your feelings to prompt you to overeat on a regular basis can be dangerous to your health, especially if you are overweight or have diabetes or another chronic disease.

CAUSES FOR YOUR CRAVINGS

- **Chronic stress** – This releases cortisol, a hormone that triggers cravings for salty and sweet foods.
- **To suppress or soothe emotions** – People often reach for food to deal with anger, anxiety, depression, fear, or resentment.
- **Social eating** – Food tempts you: cake to celebrate another staff birthday; chips and dip within your reach at a party; or a ten-foot long dessert table at a wedding. Not to mention beer, wine, and other alcoholic drinks to celebrate with.
- **Nervous energy** – People who feel uncomfortable in social situations may eat to avoid talking with others.
- **Boredom** – Nothing better to do? Might as well down an entire bag of cookies.
- **Learned habits** – If your parents rewarded you with sweets or stopped your tears with ice cream, you may be rewarding yourself with comfort food when you want to feel better.



Action Step

The next time you mindlessly reach for sweets or treats, ask yourself why. If your answer has nothing to do with physical hunger, put the food down and take a walk instead.

BREAK THE CYCLE

1. Eat as a response to hunger, not appetite. Hunger is the physical need to eat. Appetite is a psychological desire to eat. Delay 10 minutes before you eat as a response to appetite. The emotional need to eat may pass.
2. Every time you eat, write down the emotions you are feeling and whether you have physical signs of hunger. Learning your emotional eating triggers is the first step to making healthy changes.
3. Surround yourself with friends and family who support your efforts to change your eating habits.
4. Join a support group to meet other people who have similar problems.
5. Consult your doctor or health care provider if you need help controlling emotional eating.