

6 Causes of Emotional Eating and How to Deal With Them Effectively

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The causes of emotional eating are quite varied. Food can certainly be pleasurable, but the longer-lasting effects of emotional eating are negative. **Understanding the causes of emotional eating makes the solutions easier to identify.**

It can be challenging to gain mastery over emotional eating, but the benefits of doing so last a lifetime, so it's worth the struggle.

Identify the primary reasons for your emotional eating:

1. Food is used as a main source of pleasure. Those that eat emotionally often lack other ways of making themselves feel good. We all crave positive feelings. In fact, there are only two basic motivations: feeling good and avoiding pain. Essentially everything you do is motivated by these two things.

- If the primary way you make yourself feel good is via food, you're going to struggle to control your eating. **What else can you do that will make you feel good?** Try some different things and see what works.
- A few ideas include exercise, volunteering, having a meaningful conversation, increasing your social circle, playing an instrument, reading, or accomplishing your goals.

2. A lack of other options for dealing with discomfort. When we feel bad, we look for ways to feel better. Those that eat emotionally don't see the other options they have available for dealing with uncomfortable feelings. **What could you do instead of eating when you feel bad?**

- Meditation, exercise, writing in a journal, calling a friend, listening to music, dancing, playing with your child or dog, or just taking a walk in nature are a few good ideas.

3. A low threshold for discomfort. A greater ability to sit with your discomfort will reduce the need to eat emotionally. Just like some people are more capable of dealing with pain, some are more capable of handling emotional discomfort without responding negatively.

- **Most of us avoid uncomfortable situations as much as we can, but you can't get skilled at dealing with it if you avoid it.**
- Put yourself in uncomfortable situations and practice relaxing in the face of discomfort. Relaxing your body and breathing deeply sounds simple, but it's effective. Practice.

4. A lack of self-esteem. Those that eat emotionally generally aren't happy with themselves. In a sense, this is another form of emotional discomfort that emotional eaters try to soothe with food.

- There are many resources available for dealing with low self-esteem, but here are a few quick ideas to get started:
- Put a stop to your inner critic. As soon as you begin talking negatively to yourself, change your thoughts.
- Spend one minute, or five, out of every hour appreciating yourself. Make a short list of things that you like about yourself. Repeat throughout the day.

5. **Stress.** Stress itself is an issue. Stress literally changes the types of foods you crave. **Studies show that foods high in fat and/or sugar decrease the body's response to stress.** Comfort foods really do earn that name.

- Are there ways you can reduce the stress in your life? How?

6. **A lack of awareness during eating.** It's much easier to overeat when your attention is elsewhere. Whether your attention is on friends, the TV, or your thoughts, a lack of awareness can lead to overeating.

- When you're eating, do nothing else but eat. Keep your focus on your meal.

A multi-pronged approach tends to work best when dealing with the challenges of emotional eating. Consider getting the help of your doctor or a mental health professional if you're unable to make progress on your own.