

Emotional Eating

Emotional eating is eating in response to feelings rather than physical hunger. Food is often used to cope with emotions such as stress, boredom, worry, sadness, anxiety, or even happiness and celebration.

It can make healthy choices harder and often leads to overeating.

These traits may suggest you're eating in response to emotions rather than hunger:

- You eat more when stressed or under pressure
- You eat to soothe feelings or pass time
- You eat when you're not truly hungry
- You crave sugary, salty, or fatty foods
- After eating, you feel guilt or regret rather than satisfaction
- Eating feels automatic; you don't notice taste or enjoyment
- You use food as a reward (e.g., "tough day, so I'll have pudding")

What you can do:

Aim to notice when you're reaching for food for reasons other than hunger; recognising this puts you in a better position to manage your eating habits.



Stop

Before eating, pause and ask: "Am I hungry, or eating because of how I feel?"



Recognise

If it's driven by a feeling (e.g., stress, boredom, tiredness), naming the reason you're reaching for food can reduce cravings.



Distract

Interrupt the craving by shifting your focus: get active, read, text someone, drink water, stretch, or try breathing exercises. The urge often passes when you distract yourself.

Make a list of non-food activities to use when emotions feel challenging.



Plan

Eat enough at mealtimes. Plan protein- and fibre-rich meals to keep you fuller for longer and reduce cravings.

Skipping meals or having an unbalanced diet increases the risk of emotional eating and snacking.



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Be Curious

Emotional eating is common, so try not to feel guilty. Instead, get curious and ask yourself:

- Why am I craving food?
- What do I actually need (it's often not food)?
- How can I distract or quiet the craving?



Be Present

Practising mindful eating can be a good way to control your eating habits. Take the time to sit down and focus on what you are eating. Simply thinking about what you're eating, and how it tastes can slow the process of eating and leave you feeling more satisfied.

If you need help:

- **Headspace:** Headspace has tools and resources that can help with emotional eating by teaching you to reduce stress, cope with life events better, and improve your sleep health.
- **Overeaters Anonymous:** A community of like-minded people who support each other with unhelpful eating and food behaviours that they find difficult to control.
- **Beat:** A UK charity that supports people who are affected with eating disorders.
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Check with your employer if they have an EAP program

More Information:

- Understanding your eating by Julia Buckroyd
- End emotional eating by Jennifer L. Taitz

