

Better Homes and Gardens Special Interest Pu

**STOP
EMOTIONAL
EATING**
p. 76

diabetic LIVING®

Take Charge, Enjoy Life!

SPECTACULAR HOLIDAY DESSERTS

**SMART
SPLURGES**
to avoid holiday
weight gain

chocolate
meringues
142 calories
p. 89

5-ingredient
healthy
dinners

Winter 2013
Display until Jan. 27
Vol. 10, No. 4

DiabeticLivingOnline.com



SIMPLE SOUP SUPPERS
everyone will want your recipes!

BHG SIP Purple Checkout





feeding your feeling



Do you overindulge in unhealthy foods when you're happy and celebrating or sad and sulking? There are psychological and physiological reasons to reach for food for comfort. There are also ways to break the cycle.

BY Jill Weisenberger, RD, CDE | ILLUSTRATIONS BY James Steinberg

Do you identify with any of these emotional eaters?

- Angry Eater:** Joan is furious about how her boss criticized her in front of coworkers. On her way home, Joan hits the drive-through for fries and a shake. She eats them before reaching her driveway.
- Sad Eater:** Lois didn't plan to eat birthday cake at the office party. She told herself to eat just a few bites. Those bites became a whole piece and then another. Now Lois is convinced she'll never be able to stick to a healthful eating plan; she might as well eat whatever she wants. For dinner she eats a large pizza by herself.
- Lonely Eater:** Mark is home alone and feeling lonely. His girlfriend told him they need time apart. Mark turns on the television and eats an entire bag of chips before the 30-minute sitcom is over.
- Happy Eater:** Laura just found out she's getting a promotion at work. She celebrates with her sisters over beers, a bucket of wings, and cheesecake. She's so full, it hurts to get up from the table.

Many emotions lead to overeating, says dietitian Deborah Kauffmann, RD, LDN, a Maryland-based nutrition counselor for emotional eaters. In fact, 45 percent of emotional eating results from positive emotions, says Brian Wansink, Ph.D., author of *Slim by Design: Mindless Eating Solutions for Everyday Life* (HarperCollins, 2014). Happy emotional eaters reach for food in an effort to maintain their positive mood, while unhappy emotional eaters seek to achieve a good mood, he says.

Does emotional eating work? Not well, the experts say. "Emotional eating is the biggest barrier to weight loss," says Jennifer L. Taitz, Psy.D., a licensed clinical psychologist in New York and Los Angeles and the author of *End Emotional Eating* (New Harbinger Publications, 2012).

An illustration of a woman's profile in shades of orange and yellow, looking towards the right. Her hair is styled in wavy brown curls. A hand in a yellow sleeve holds a three-layer chocolate cake on a light blue plate. The cake has three layers of brown frosting and two layers of white filling. The text on the cake reads: "It's just a few bites", "I'm eating what I want", and "May as well celebrate big".

People reach for foods that made them feel good in the past. Women tend to console themselves with foods that are convenient, like chips and cookies.

—Brian Wansink, Ph.D

The immediate positive effects of emotional eating may be a distraction, a boost in the brain's feel-good chemicals, more energy, and satisfaction from a fun food. However, just 30 minutes later, emotional eaters tend to rate themselves as feeling more guilty and more dissatisfied with themselves, Wansink says.

And don't forget that unplanned eating often causes a big jump in blood glucose. The consequences are far more dire, warns Kauffmann. Once the distraction and calming effects of eating wear off, toxic emotions of guilt and shame often replace them. The long-term effects include lower self-esteem, a lack of trust in one's body, and

intrusive thoughts about food and weight, she says. There is another problem associated with eating to quash negative emotions: "We fail to learn from the wisdom of our emotions when we try to fill ourselves rather than learn from our feelings," Taitz says.

Psychology and biology are at play

"If you believe your emotions are difficult to manage, overwhelming, or dangerous, you may rely on food to comfort you," Taitz says. If you eat for comfort often enough, it becomes a habit. "The first time you grab a croissant at your coffee place, it may be a choice—though the fifth time, you may barely deliberate," she says. Habits are hard to break because the habit-forming part of the brain allows us to act without much effort. So if you often soothe hurt feelings with a buttery croissant or a creamy milk shake, you're likely to do it automatically. And if this becomes your standard way of dealing with emotions, you might begin to confuse emotional discomfort with physical hunger, Taitz says.

Stress also can lead to an increase in the appetite-stimulating hormone ghrelin. Even the specific food you desire may be deep-rooted in your brain. People reach for foods that made them feel good in the past, Wansink says. A man may crave foods like steak, pasta, or soup if it relates to being taken care of by his mom or someone who prepared his meals. Women, on the other hand, tend to console themselves with foods that are convenient and require no cooking, like chips and cookies.

Continued on page 80 ➔

Feed Your Future

Break free of emotional eating. There are techniques to ease the pull to the drive-through or cookie jar. These strategies can help end the pattern of feeling a mood and reaching for food.

Keep a log. Increasing awareness is key, says dietician Cathy Leman, RD, LD, a Chicago-area nutrition counselor. Tracking food and identifying your mood while eating is eye-opening. "Many times people have no idea that they turn to food when feeling lonely or frustrated," she says. The type and amount of food may be astonishing once it's in writing.

Learn to manage your emotions. Your log will help you identify and name your emotions, Leman says, which paves the way for dialogue or self-reflection about the situations that trigger the strong emotions.

Develop a keen sense of your values. "In the moment, we forget what matters," Taitz says. Knowing what's important helps you choose appropriate actions. For example, keeping a photo of his kids nearby can help a truck driver remember what's in his heart when his mind screams *drive-through*, Taitz explains.

Develop nonfood coping skills. Eating emotionally expresses and reinforces that we don't have the skills to cope in healthful ways.

Regularly soothe yourself without calories. Try deep breathing or a five-minute jumping-jack break, relax with a warm bath or a cup of tea, or write your thoughts in a journal. Learn to talk to yourself the way you would talk to a friend—with kindness and thoughtfulness.

Push the pause button. Putting time between the urge to eat and actually eating lets you remember your values and nonfood coping skills. Tell yourself, for example, that if you still feel the need to eat after the timer goes off in 15 minutes, you'll allow it. You'll likely notice that the intensity of your craving fluctuates and dwindles to a manageable level.

Remove temptation. If you reach for ice cream or cheesy potato chips in moments of despair, banish them from your house.

Seek help. Calling a friend may be enough. But if emotional eating is a continuous problem or hurts your emotional or physical health, ask friends or your physician for the name of a therapist. Leman frequently refers people to a therapist skilled in helping conquer unhealthy eating behaviors. **DL**

Relax with a cup of tea

Keep a food/mood log

Try deep breathing