Emotions and Weight Management

HEALTH ACTION GUIDE

Emotions are a big part of our daily lives. And they can impact our weight by influencing our eating and physical activity decisions. This guide helps you take a closer look at how your emotions may be affecting your weight. You'll learn healthier ways to deal with your feelings so they're less likely to sabotage your weight management efforts.

HOW EMOTIONS AFFECT EATING AND ACTIVITY HABITS

From the moment we wake up in the morning, we are often aware of how we feel. For example, you may have jumped (or crawled) out of bed this morning thinking, "I feel great" or, "I feel tired."

Most of us, from time to time, find ourselves eating in response to certain emotions, even if we weren't hungry in the first place. These emotions are called "emotional triggers." A common emotional trigger is stress. Have you ever found yourself eating for comfort after a particularly stressful day?

Our emotions may also affect our activity. We might decide to do something active when we're angry. On the other hand, if we're discouraged, we may decide to skip our planned exercise for the day.

THE BENEFITS OF MANAGING EMOTIONS AND MANAGING WEIGHT

Being in charge of how your emotions affect your eating habits can help you feel much better about yourself. Some other benefits are listed below. Check off those that are important to you and add any others you can think of.

- ☐ enjoying food more
- ☐ feeling "in control"
- ☐ feeling less stressed
- ☐ having more "emotional energy" to give to other things or people
- ☐ feeling healthier
- ☐ enjoying my appearance more
- ☐ _____

Next, read through the feelings listed below. Think about what you normally do when you experience that feeling. If the emotion usually disrupts your healthy eating or activity intentions, check the box. If you don't see an emotion you commonly experience listed, write it in.

- ☐ happy
- ☐ proud
- ☐ discouraged/depressed
- ☐ lonely
- ☐ stressed
- ☐ nervous/anxious
- ☐ bored
- ☐ excited
- ☐ relaxed
- ☐ angry
- ☐ tired
- ☐ frustrated
- ☐ content
- ☐ sad
- ☐ overwhelmed
- ☐ worried
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

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HEALTHY RESPONSES TO EMOTIONS

If you checked any of the emotions on the previous page, take a moment to think of things you can do to "short circuit" your usual response to certain feelings or emotions. What could you do the next time you feel tense, happy, or sad, that wouldn't hurt your weight management efforts?

Here are a few ideas to get you started. Check off those that appeal to you, and add any others that have worked for you in the past or that you think may help now.

The next time I feel *Happy, Excited or Proud* I could:

- ☐ Talk about it
- ☐ Buy myself a small present
- ☐ Do something I really enjoy
- ☐ Go out and do something active
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

The next time I feel *Relaxed or Contented* I could:

- ☐ Tell someone how I feel
- ☐ Consciously enjoy the moment and positive emotions I'm experiencing
- ☐ Take a quiet walk
- ☐ Read a favorite book or magazine
- ☐ Enjoy a leisurely cup of coffee or tea
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

The next time I feel *Sad, Discouraged or Lonely* I could:

- ☐ Ask someone who cares for me to listen while I talk
- ☐ Tell a friend or relative I'd like a hug
- ☐ Do something nice for myself or for someone else
- ☐ Write about it in a journal
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

The next time I feel *Nervous, Worried, Stressed or Overwhelmed* I could:

- ☐ Take a deep breath, hold it for 5 seconds, and then slowly exhale through my mouth. Repeat three times.
- ☐ Talk to someone about the problem
- ☐ Do a few slow stretching exercises or yoga
- ☐ Write about the problem and some possible solutions
- ☐ Go for a walk
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

The next time I feel *Tired* I could:

- ☐ Exercise because it can re-energize me
- ☐ Evaluate my sleep habits and make getting enough sleep a priority
- ☐ Take a nap
- ☐ Meditate
- ☐ Lie down on the floor and just relax for a few minutes
- ☐ Do something enjoyable that doesn't require too much energy
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

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The next time I feel *Bored* I could:

- ☐ Take up a new hobby, craft or project
- ☐ Read an interesting book or magazine
- ☐ Do some physical activity
- ☐ Seek out an interesting person to talk to
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

The next time I feel *Angry or Frustrated* I could:

- ☐ Explain the reasons for my frustration or anger to someone
- ☐ Let my anger or frustration out safely by exercising or yelling in a private place
- ☐ Take one small step to resolve my anger or frustration
- ☐ Do something active and productive, like yard work or gardening or vacuuming the entire house
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

CRUNCHY, SWEET, SOFT, WARM...

While it is best to substitute activities for eating in response to emotions, you can also substitute low-calorie for high-calorie foods at those times when you just have to put something in your mouth.

Some people find that certain kinds of foods satisfy certain emotional needs. For example, one person may like to eat crunchy food when they feel stressed. Another person may crave something sweet in the same situation. Once you become aware of your personal preferences, you can select lower-calorie foods with the same tastes or textures.

Here are some lower calorie snack foods that may meet some of your emotional needs. Circle any that you find appealing:

Crunchy	Sweet	Soft	Warm	Chocolate
pretzels (1 ounce) 110 calories	mixed fruit (1/2 cup) 60 calories	low-fat yogurt (6 ounces) 150 calories	plain tea (1 cup/8 ounces) 0 calories	Low-fat frozen fudge bar 90 calories
raw vegetable sticks (1 cup) 50 calories	dried fruit (1/4 cup) 85 calories	sugar-free gelatin (1 cup) 20 calories	plain coffee (1 cup/8 ounces) 0 calories	Dark chocolate (1 oz.) 155 calories
graham crackers (2) 60 calories	fig bars (2) 110 calories	banana (1 small) 90 calories	broth (1 cup/8 ounces) 10 calories	
air-popped popcorn (3 cups) 90 calories	sugar-free gum (1 stick) 5 calories	light ice cream (1/2 cup) 120 calories	sugar-free hot chocolate (1 cup/8 ounces) 60 calories	

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database

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BINGE EATING

If you eat a large amount of food at one time, it is called overeating. If you eat a large amount and feel unable to control what or how much is being eaten, it is called binge eating. Binge eating often happens in secret. When recurrent binge eating is followed by purging (vomiting, laxative or diuretic use, excessive exercise, or fasting after binge eating), it is an eating disorder known as bulimia nervosa This is a dangerous way to attempt weight management and requires professional attention.

Binge eating becomes a problem if it happens often, causes you distress, or threatens your health. Purging is a serious and sometimes life-threatening disorder. If you go on eating "binges," or if you purge, contact your Employee Assistance Counselor or see a professional counselor who has a background in eating disorders.

PLAN YOUR RESPONSE

Plan ahead so that the next time you find yourself eating or becoming inactive in response to a feeling, you will have a healthier response at your fingertips. Use the space below to list the three feelings that are most likely to get in the way of managing your weight—and plan a healthy action you can take when that feeling hits.

The Next Time I Feel:	I'll Take This Healthy Action:

Keep track of your progress. If one substitute behavior doesn't work too well, try another. And if you must eat, try a lower calorie snack choice.

Gaining control over emotional eating puts YOU in the driver's seat and gives you the freedom to make healthy choices.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health, Binge Eating Disorder, June 2009. www.womenshealth.gov

This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please consult your doctor for advice about changes that may affect your health.

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