

# EMOTIONAL EATING HANDBOOK



## EMOTIONAL EATING

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# INTRODUCTION TO EMOTIONAL EATING

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Would thunder be half as majestic without lightning to illuminate the night sky with every roar?

Would Ginger Rogers float with such impossible elegance without the accomplished hands of Fred Astaire to guide her?

If they'd never met on a cold and dreary morning in 1950s Liverpool, would Lennon or McCartney have penned some of the most memorable songs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

You see, some things just belong together. Drawn to one another with an irresistible, magnetic force, they are unquestionably better off as a couple.

Don't be fooled, however, into thinking that just because things are drawn together, that they are richer for finding one another.

Things didn't turn out so well for Bonnie and Clyde, and while Romeo and Juliet may be lauded in posterity, it's fair to say that were their chance encounter avoided, they would probably have lived long and happy lives instead of an ever so romantic but ultimately unsatisfying 'his' and 'hers' ending.

Which leads me onto the irrepressible relationship between emotions and large amounts of readily available, highly digestible, completely unsuitable food.

Emotions are wild, ravenous creatures that don't respond to reason or logic because emotions are hungry.

## “Biology, smiology”

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We have two good feet for walking. Two eyes for looking at things. A couple of ever so useful hands for picking up the things that we see. We've been given two ears for hearing things and a mouth for telling people what we've heard.

That all makes sense.

What doesn't make quite as much sense is why an irrepressible sensor runs directly from our tummy to our brain, rewarding processed food consumption with a super-sized portion of 'feel good for about 10 minutes'.

Why does junk food release serotonin and dopamine? (Hormones that make us feel temporarily better.)

A doctor of ancestral eating patterns will no doubt enlighten me, so I'll pre-empt below:

“When there was a food shortage in our 'hunter gatherer' days, it was very important we ate lots of food to survive. Food was in short supply, therefore our brains would reward us for eating high calorie, high energy foods.”

I thus retort: “Blah, blah blah-de-blah...”

A dollop of happy hormones to reward us for tucking into a raw mammoth thigh in such plighted circumstances seems somewhat surplus to requirements when we're already preventing certain death!

Be that as it may, there is no escaping the fact that eating high calorie, high energy foods releases feel-good hormones, and when whoever created the human body created the human body, they didn't factor in Häagen-Dazs competing with Ben & Jerry's to create the most deliciously flavoured ice cream the world has ever seen.

Which brings me onto the emotion/eating relationship.

It is destructive, unhealthy and damaging. If Emotions was Eating's spouse, Eating would terminate the marriage, citing unreasonable behaviour from Emotions as indisputable ground for decree absolute.

## A separation

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Health and contentment are two entirely distinct battles.

**Statement 1:** Becoming healthy will not necessarily equate to you feeling happier. Although it will probably help.

**Statement 2:** Becoming happier will not necessarily equate to healthy behaviours. Although it will probably help.

I've used the term 'happy' to embarrassingly oversimplify and incompetently describe the concept of an absence of the incalculable variety of negative emotional issues the human psyche can experience.

In this context, I'm pretty convinced perpetual 'happiness' is an impossibility.

I like to compare an emotional life to painting the Forth of Firth Bridge, (a bridge in Scotland, famous for always being painted, such is its vast size). Just when you think you've finished and stand back to inspect the wonderful job you've done, you notice that an old part of the bridge is starting to show signs of wear and tear and you're back to work again.

Since the job of emotional management is an ongoing one, linking emotions with eating is a monstrously bad idea.

Many experts correctly ascertain that if you solve your emotional problems, you will stop emotional eating. This is, of course, almost entirely true.

The problem being that nobody, ever, has solved the puzzle of fixing emotions.

There is another word for emotional struggle and strife.

That word is *life*.

So, if you're willing to accept that you're pretty unlikely to solve the mystery of life anytime soon, it shouldn't take a great leap of faith to accept that you'll need to take a different strategy to overcome emotional eating.



When you feel bad. Don't eat. Ask yourself why you feel bad. Then feel bad.

When you feel happy. Don't eat. Ask yourself what made you happy. Then feel happy.

When you feel scared. Don't eat. Ask yourself why you are afraid. Then feel scared.

Emotions know the square root of nothing about food. They have VERY important messages to deliver but they haven't got a single clue when it comes to cuisine.

Our emotional eating handbook provides you with five very simple habits to implement and beat emotional eating.

Will achieving your health goals reconcile all of the emotional struggles you have? No, it won't, but you will feel more resilient and able to confront life's challenges.



# CONQUER EMOTIONAL EATING

Emotional eating has as much complexity as there are people in the world. Everybody has an entirely different experience.

On the other hand it is incredibly simple:

1. You eat impulsively and without thinking.
2. You eat for reasons beyond the need for food.
3. You hold false beliefs about food that prevent you from reaching your goals.

If we can remove the above three factors from the equation, we are left with only two times to eat:

1. When we are actually hungry.
2. When we have decided we are going to eat (including 'unhealthy' foods and celebrations).

With the five-step emotional eating plan we will give you five simple habits that, when implemented, will allow you to enjoy all types of food free from guilt and in quantities that are in line with your goals.

## Physical hunger versus emotional appetite

It is important to separate the physiological need for food from the emotional appetite for it.

One is essential to survival and the other is a surefire way to ruin your goals!

Hunger is the physiological call to food	Appetite is the emotional call to food
Physical hunger builds up gradually	Emotional appetite comes on suddenly
Physical hunger is patient	Emotional appetite demands immediate attention
Physical hunger can be satisfied	Emotional appetite is insatiable
After eating for physical hunger you feel satisfied	After eating for emotional appetite you feel guilty
Physical hunger appears two to three hours after previous meal	Emotional appetite can appear at any time

## The truth about hunger and weight loss

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If you want to lose weight you will feel physiologically hungry and you won't always be able to satisfy it. The process of 'not having enough calories' is what will cause your body to raid the stores of fat to release them for energy.

If you want to make progress, you'll need to feel hungry from time to time. The difference with physiological hunger is after 30 minutes your body will free up stored fat for energy use and your hunger will pass.

Emotional appetite does not follow the same rules.

You are experiencing emotional appetite and driven to emotional eating any time you are not eating based on hunger signals. Emotional eating is never useful and this handbook will help you remove this habit and develop a healthy relationship with all foods.

## The five habits

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Action is the driver of all change.

We could write and talk about emotional eating all day, but only action creates change.

The emotional eating handbook has five proactive habits you can implement in order to create success.

### Proactive habit 1 – write down your triggers

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Actively try and highlight the moments you feel triggered to emotional eating.

- Is it boredom?
- Is it social events?
- Disappointment?
- Success?
- Fear?
- Anxiety?
- The smell of food?
- Relationships?
- Locations?

When it comes to behaviour, awareness is nine-tenths of the law. If you can successfully identify the triggers and moments that draw you towards emotional eating, you can start the process of overriding them and taking control of your decisions.

Your habit is to identify your triggers as they happen and create awareness.

## Case study – Susan, 43

Susan was a lifetime emotional eater and despite exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet, her results were always hijacked by what she considered to be uncontrollable binge eating.

I asked her what caused the emotional eating. She thought she knew but I asked her to write down what those things were anyway.

The next week, she came back to see me and I asked her if she was happy to talk to me about what she had learned.

She was visibly shocked at how many different events and moments in her life were associated with food. While she had expected emotions like stress or anger to be triggers, the television, the phone ringing, her mum texting her, boredom and even walking past the bakers were triggering her.

Her entire life was littered with moments she had been hanging food on to 'cope' with.

In her words:

"When I actually asked myself if I was hungry or just being triggered by events, I was surprised at how easy it was to avoid emotional eating. Awareness was the key moment for me."

This was a revelation to Susan, and while it wasn't all plain sailing and hurdles were still to be leaped, from this point onwards we were finally able to help her reach her goals.

## Proactive habit 2 – pause

The most valuable gift we can learn in mastery of self is the ability to pause and 'take a moment' before engaging in behaviour.

A profound pause that creates space for rationale.

Of all the habits we can create in defence of emotional eating this is the greatest of all. While pausing for a single minute may seem such an insignificant amount of time, this moment creates a vast ocean between your emotions and your ultimate behaviour.

In the context of emotional eating that is groundbreaking.

In the newly formed ocean between you and your action, your logical mind can rise to the surface and enter the debate. (That is not to say your logical mind will always win the argument, but at least it will enter the conversation.)



Within this minute, a number of questions can arise.

“Do I really want that piece of cake? Maybe a handful of nuts is better?”

“Am I actually hungry? Maybe I’m bored?”

“How am I going to feel afterwards? Is it worth it?”

Work at developing this habit into your daily routine in the same way you work at exercising every day.

Here is the habit:

**1. Whenever you are going to eat, set your phone/watch timer to 60 seconds.**

**2. In that 60 seconds, bring rationale to your decision. Ask yourself questions about your hunger:**

- Am I hungry or thirsty?
- Am I hungry or am I trying to change the way I feel?
- Are there healthier options I could eat instead?
- What other things could I do instead?
- How does this decision align with my goals?
- Is this ‘junk food’ part of my plan or is it driven by emotions.
- What am I actually looking to achieve?
- Am I bored? Am I angry? Am I frustrated?

**3. At the end of the 60 seconds, make the decision and take action accordingly.**

**4. If, five minutes later, you get driven to emotional eating again, repeat the process. Before ANY food passes your mouth; your behaviour is to pause for 60 seconds.**

That is the proactive emotional eating habit you are introducing to your life.

Exercise ✓

Eat plenty of vegetables ✓

Drink water ✓

Pause for a minute before eating ✓

Creating habits is central to success. Take every habit you build seriously if you believe that habit is important to your long-term success.

### Case study – Michael, 59

Michael was a compulsive eater. When I asked him to write down what his triggers were he struggled to identify them, even a week later.

"I almost go into an out of body experience. I don't even know why I'm doing it or enjoy it most of the time. I just kinda do it and then think "oh no, what did I do that for?"

I gave him a specific habit to work on. Rather than ask what the trigger is, just pause before you are about to eat whatever it is you are about to eat.

This became the central habit Michael needed to break his emotional eating habit. He had a very clear set of goals and creating the habit of 'pausing' gave him time to bring his long-term goals to the conversation.

Michael is a slightly unique case, but not that unique amongst men I have worked with. They often find it harder to identify triggers but can be very effective at aligning goals with behaviours within a structure.

## Proactive habit 3 – control your environment

If the foods you desire when confronting emotional eating are not available, then you can't have them. If healthier foods and/or water are available you will have them instead.

This strategy really is that simple.

There is a two-step approach to controlling your environment.

### 1. Remove all temptations

- Clear your cupboards of tempting foods, treats and snacks that you know you would be tempted by if available. (We know this can be hard with small children, but not impossible.)
- Remove temptations from your car and anywhere else you may go.
- Remove temptations from work as much as possible. (We understand this can be hard too.)
- Take minimum cash to places like the cinema or coffee shops, so you can only buy what you planned for and nothing more.

### 2. Have suitable replacements available at all times

- Make a list of healthy snacks you can enjoy (replacement snacks are a last resort).
- Have them available.
- Have a bottle of water available as a first solution all the time.

**Note:** This habit should be seen as a temporary habit rather than a permanent one.

## Proactive habit 4 - create a new habit

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There is a saying in behaviour change circles.

If an inanimate object can do it, it's not a behaviour. A chair can 'not eat' therefore, 'not eating' is not a behaviour.

If we are going to stop one behaviour, in this instance emotional eating, we need to replace it with another positive one.

### What positive habits can you replace your emotional eating with?

- Drinking a glass of water?
- Taking five minutes of meditation?
- Walking 500 steps?
- Reading a book for five minutes?
- Doing 10 push ups?

Find a positive habit that you can enforce to replace your emotional eating habit and make that a habit.

**If you are an emotional eater you must take this as seriously as you take your daily workout for your goals.**

**Note:** As a last resort you can have a healthy snack as your replacement behaviour but this is a short-term solution. We are trying to avoid eating for emotions, so using food is not ideal.

### *Case study - Sarah, 64*

Sarah was a doer. She pressed play every day without fail. She had excellent 'active' discipline and yet struggled with 'passive' discipline.

I explained that doers needed things to do.

"It was like a revelation to me. To treat drinking water or going for a walk as an active behaviour in the same way that exercise had become part of my routine. This simple concept changed my life. Not only did I break my emotional eating habit, I broke my ski sit record by 60 seconds."

**P.S.** In case you hadn't guessed Sarah had decided to do the ski sit whenever she was caught up in emotional appetite.

## Proactive habit 5 – think sustainable

Feeling restricted and deprived of foods is not positive for long-term goals. Many people are frightened to eat foods that have always been associated with comfort eating, but it is important to change your relationship with food if you want long-term success.

Provided you have a predominantly healthy diet, there will be no considerable difference to your diet between choosing a banana or a small chocolate bar or cookie as a snack.

Having reasonably sized snacks that you enjoy scheduled into your plan – those you have previously overeaten and felt **guilty** eating in periods of emotional eating – will change your relationships with these foods to a positive and enjoyable one.

No food is good or bad. It is just food.

You can have a balanced and enjoyable relationship with all types of food, provided you either:

- A. Have them scheduled into a nutrition plan that is based around your goals.
- B. Eat when you are physiologically hungry.
- C. Do not eat when you are emotionally hungry.

### Case study – Ali, 37

Friday evening came around and Ali had enjoyed a really great week of healthy eating and exercising.

She took a look in the cupboards and saw a big bag of Doritos.

"I felt I deserved a treat for all of my hard work in the week. I opened the bag, intending only to have a few, but ended up eating the whole bag. I felt guilty afterwards and felt like I'd ruined all of my hard work." I spoke with Ali the next day and explained that one bag of Doritos would have negligible impact on her overall results and to let it go and not turn an insignificant moment into a disaster.

I then explained the importance of having snacks and treats built into the week so you can prepare, plan and ultimately change your relationship with food.

We agreed that Ali could have a portion of Doritos every Friday night with a glass of wine to relax, enjoy and celebrate her accomplishments. Rather than feel guilty, Ali enjoyed her Doritos and developed a positive relationship with what had previously been a comfort food.

For as long as I worked with Ali she retained this habit and looked forwards to her weekly treat while achieving her long-term goals.



### Final word

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These habits are not ideas.

These habits are not concepts.

These habits are not words for you to read and agree with.

**They are habits - like exercise or eating vegetables.**

### THE FIVE HABITS

**Habit 1** - Write down your triggers

**Habit 2** - Pause

**Habit 3** - Control your environment

**Habit 4** - Create a new habit

**Habit 5** - Think sustainable



# HEALTHY FOOD THOUGHTS

To develop a healthy relationship with foods, rather than an emotional one, it is helpful to have a list of healthy thoughts around food.

Print this out and place it on your fridge or somewhere else you look every day.

## HEALTHY FOOD THOUGHTS

**1. Food is just food.**

Food is not anything except food. It is not the reason for my problems, nor is it the solution to them. It is just food.

**2. Eating for social reasons is great.**

I eat healthily for many reasons. This does not mean enjoying foods of all types with friends and family is not a good thing, provided it is part of my plan and in line with my goals.

**3. If I want results I can't just 'eat what I want'.**

Everything worth having in life requires some form of compromise. A healthy body requires me to consider the foods I eat. A healthy body and life is more valuable to me than food.

**4. Habits are the driving force behind my ultimate results.**

It is the habits I implement on a daily basis that will create the healthy body I want to have.

**5. If I make a mistake it doesn't make too much long-term difference.**

I am not perfect. Sometimes I make a mistake and don't stay with my plan. That is fine as long as I let it go and move on.

**6. Food doesn't solve my stress or make things better.**

I understand that food has never solved any of the problems in my life, but I do not blame it for any of the problems I have either. It is just food.

**7. Healthy eating doesn't mean perfect eating.**

I can eat between 70% and 90% healthy foods and still have a healthy body. No food is bad or good. It is just food.

**8. Eating less or more of something is my choice.**

I do not 'have' to eat fewer calories or lose weight. I choose to eat fewer calories and more vegetables because a healthy body is important to me.

**9. Food helps me achieve my goals.**

Healthy nutrition makes me feel better, perform better and achieve all my goals in life better.

**10. My body is valuable to me. It deserves good fuel.**

I value my body as the most valuable asset I will ever own. I will respect it and give it the fuel it deserves.