Take Control of Stress Eating

We don't always eat simply to satisfy hunger. We also turn to food for comfort, stress relief, or as a reward. Unfortunately, emotional eating doesn't fix emotional problems. It usually makes you feel worse. Afterward, not only does the original emotional issue remain, but you also feel guilty for overeating. Learning to recognize your emotional eating triggers is the first step to breaking free from food cravings and compulsive overeating, and changing the habits that have sabotaged your diets in the past.

Stop emotional eating tip 1: Identify your triggers

People eat for many different reasons. The first step in putting a stop to emotional eating is identifying your personal triggers. What situations, places, or feelings make you reach for the comfort of food? Keep in mind that while most emotional eating is linked to unpleasant feelings, it can also be triggered by positive emotions, such as rewarding yourself for achieving a goal or celebrating a holiday or happy event.

Stop emotional eating tip 2: Find other ways to feed your feelings

If you don't know how to manage your emotions in a way that doesn't involve food, you won't be able to control your eating habits for very long. Diets so often fail because they offer logical nutritional advice, as if the only thing keeping you from eating right is knowledge. But that kind of advice only works if you have conscious control over your eating habits. It doesn't work when emotions hijack the process, demanding an immediate payoff with food.

In order to stop emotional eating, you have to find other ways to fulfill yourself emotionally. It's not enough to understand the cycle of emotional eating or even to understand your triggers, although that's a huge first step. You need alternatives to food that you can turn to for emotional fulfillment.

Stop emotional eating tip 3: Pause when cravings hit

Most emotional eaters feel powerless over their food cravings. When the urge to eat hits, it's all you can think about. You feel an almost unbearable tension that demands to be fed, right now! Because you've tried to resist in the past and failed, you believe that your willpower just isn't up to snuff. But the truth is that you have more power over your cravings than you think.

Stop emotional eating tip 4: Support yourself with healthy lifestyle habits

When you're physically strong, relaxed, and well rested, you're better able to handle the curveballs that life inevitably throws your way. But when you're already exhausted and overwhelmed, any little hiccup has the potential to send you off the rails and straight toward the refrigerator. Exercise, sleep, and other healthy lifestyle habits will help you get through difficult times without emotional eating.

- **Make daily exercise a priority.** Physical activity does wonders for your mood and your energy levels, and it's also a powerful stress reducer.
- **Make time for relaxation.** Give yourself permission to take at least 30 minutes every day to relax, decompress, and unwind. This is your time to take a break from your responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Connect with others.** Don't underestimate the importance of close relationships and social activities. Spending time with positive people who enhance your life will help protect you from the negative effects of stress.

Source: HelpGuide.org