

Curb Emotional Eating



Like many people, you may seek occasional solace in a bowl of ice cream or slice of pizza after a bad day. When you find yourself seeking out food to comfort you, you are eating in response to your emotions, rather than to hunger.

Occasional emotional eating isn't a problem for most people. After all, that's what makes comfort food so appealing. But turning to food every time you have unpleasant feelings — or even positive ones — can lead to weight gain, says the American Dietetic Association (ADA). Being overweight can increase your risk for obesity-related health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease. And it can take a toll on your self-esteem and emotional health.

Understand Your Cravings

The first step in dealing with emotional eating is to learn to recognize the difference between emotional and physical hunger, the ADA says. Here are some clues that can help you identify emotional eating:

- Sudden hunger
- Craving one specific type of food, such as pizza, because no other food will satisfy your hunger
- Difficulty stopping eating once you are full
- Feeling guilty after eating
- Eating to reward or nurture yourself

What Can You Do?

Once you learn to identify emotional eating, it helps to keep track of those things that trigger you to eat when you are not hungry, the ADA says. Many people often eat in response to feeling sad, anxious, depressed or lonely. Come up with substitutions for emotional eating. For example, take a walk, call a friend, engage in a hobby, or do anything else that can distract you from wanting to eat. It also helps to replace unhealthy comfort foods with healthy ones and practice portion control. You don't need to completely give up foods that comfort you, just eat less of them.

If You Need Extra Help

If you've been an emotional eater for a long time, you may find it difficult to stop on your own. In particular, if you are depressed or have low self-esteem, it may be helpful to talk with a therapist or a dietitian who works with eating disorders, the ADA says. Finding a support group for people dealing with similar issues can provide needed guidance for dealing with emotional eating. Talking with your health care provider about your concerns is a good place to start.

