

Eating Styles: The Emotional Eater

Food can be used in a variety of ways. Food can provide comfort during times of stress or when feeling depressed. Food can be used as a “security blanket” during times of loneliness or when feeling anxious. Some may use food as a “treat” when feeling bored or frustrated.

If you have identified yourself as using food to deal with emotions, you need to find other, non-food ways of dealing with these emotions. A list of common emotions is provided below. Identify those emotions with which you have been using food to cope. Brainstorm and develop non-food activities that can be substituted for eating.

Emotion	Current coping method	Future coping method
Anger		
Depression		
Boredom		
Anxiety		
Frustration		
Happiness		
Nervousness		
Other		

Don't let your thoughts and emotions get the best of you! Develop your non-food plan of how you will deal with your negative thoughts & emotions before they come. New solutions come only after you have identified the problem(s).

Don't expect to be perfect, the next time the problem or thought appears. You may have been using food for a long time to cope. Changing habits takes time and practice.

Avoid automatic self-defeating thoughts. When do you do not meet a goal, you most likely feel disappointed. The way you handle your disappointment can determine whether or not you eat inappropriately.

Irrational thoughts often lead to inappropriate eating. See examples of thoughts that weight losers may experience. Have you ever found yourself with these thoughts?

“All or nothing thinker” refers to a person’s evaluation of himself or herself as a success or failure, with no graduations of success in between. For example you might think that a 2 pound weight loss is a success, but no weight loss is a total failure. **Success is a matter of degree, not absolutes.**

“Finding failure” refers to a tendency of people who are trying to lose weight to focus only on their failures, and totally disregarding their successes. Remember, successes are often more important than the failures.

“Doom saying” refers to the tendency of people who are watching their weight to think because they made a mistake on one occasion, they are doomed to repeat this mistake over and over. They feel there is little hope in changing the inappropriate behavior(s).

Bariatric surgery alters the stomach; it does not alter your emotions or thoughts. Take steps now to make positive changes. Identification, planning and practice are all important in learning to cope without the help of food. Seek professional help from a psychologist or behavior therapist for additional guidance.

Taking steps to handle the emotional onset:

Some emotions, such as boredom, can be effectively conquered by engaging in other activities. Develop a list of alternative activities that will get you busy and get your mind onto other things.

Alternative activities can be an activity you enjoy or a job that needs to be completed.

Examples of alternative activities:

- Read a novel
- Start a hobby
- Organize at home: clean out drawers, closets
- Write letters or e-mail friends or family
- Exercise
- Give yourself a manicure
- The list is endless!

Alternative Activities List:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Examples of stress/anxiety reduction:

- Enjoy a message
- Enroll in a yoga class
- Take a walk or other exercise
- Take a warm bath
- Listen to soft music in the car or at home
- Take time to do some deep breathing exercises
- Your activity for stress reduction: _____
