

# Emotional Eating "The battle for the mind"!

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Eating can be a highly emotional process. Food does more than just fill our stomachs. If you take more notice of what you are eating, why you are eating it and what you are feeling it may surprise you. While eating to satisfy hunger is a normal function, emotional eating can be a self defeating and destructive force in someone's life.

*Emotional eating is to eat for a reason other than hunger.*

Emotional eating moods can include: stress, distress, depression, happiness, boredom, anxiety, sadness, agitation, avoidance, compulsion, tired, weak, sleepy, frustration, disappointment, adversity, failure.

University studies have been done to see what foods people eat to match what mood they are in. People tend to eat popcorn, pizza or steak when they are happy, ice cream, cookies and cake when they are sad, and potato chips when they are bored. Studies also show that depressed people tend to eat twice as much at a snack session than happy people, linking depression to obesity.

<http://psychcentral.com/news/2007/02/05/mood-influences-eating-behavior>

*Comfort foods are eaten either to achieve a feeling or maintain a feeling. They can even be an addictive response providing endorphins and exogenous opioids to the brain.*

We are programmed early in life to attach different emotions with different food. When a child is sad what do we give them? Cookies or candy? So the pattern for comfort through food is often set up early and re-enforced throughout life. We program our kids to respond to foods at an early age. Punishment can be equated to hunger when the punishment is forcing a child to miss a meal because of bad behavior. Rewards of sweets for good behavior can set up patterns for emotional eating also.

## **Five differences between emotional eating and normal hunger:**

University of Texas Counseling and Mental Health Center web site:

1. Emotional hunger comes on suddenly; physical hunger occurs gradually.
2. When you are eating to fill a void that isn't related to an empty stomach, you crave a specific food, such as pizza or ice cream, and only that food will meet your need. When you eat because you are actually hungry, you're open to options.
3. Emotional hunger feels like it needs to be satisfied instantly with the food you crave; physical hunger can wait.
4. Even when you are full, if you're eating to satisfy an emotional need, you're more likely to keep eating. When you're eating because you're hungry, you're more likely to stop when you're full.
5. Emotional eating can leave behind feelings of guilt; eating when you are physically hungry does not.

*According to the University of MD 75% of all overeating is due to emotions.*

## **The brain connection**

Your gut is densely lined with neuro-peptides and receptors that exchange emotional information. The pancreas alone releases 20 emotionally laden peptides. These emotionally charged peptides regulate assimilation and storage of nutrients. They also help transmit information about being full or hungry to the brain.

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. Gluten interferes with leptin, which is a hormone that does several things in the body. Leptin signals the brain that the tummy is full; it signals fat cells to break up; and

leptin also normalizes pain receptors in the spinal column. An imbalance in leptin levels alone can cause overeating, interfere with the fat burning process and actually cause fibromyalgia pain.

Fungi and bacteria reside in the colon and produce over 80% of the body's neuro chemicals. Gut bacteria have been proven to influence everything you do. This would of course include emotional eating. The human body contains 10 times more bacteria than human cells and should maintain 90% good, friendly bacteria to function optimally. Bacteria and fungi control the environment of the body by slowing down digestion and rewarding or punishing you for things you eat.

<http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2009/02/bacteriablood/>

## Eating tips

Eat when you are hungry and not when you are sad or angry. Never eat because of an emotional feeling you are trying to bury. This can make your food toxic and interfere with normal digestive function by speeding up or slowing down digestion. Emotional eating can cause your body to crave carbohydrates and saturated fats and lead to an inordinate storage of fats.

*Toxic thoughts lead to toxic emotions, which lead to a toxic body!*

Reduce carb intake, especially the refined carbs that are also called "comfort foods." "Comfort foods" release feel-good neuro chemicals to the body and brain. However, this comfort is short-lived and ends up in a downward spiral. Carbs are also not good food for thinking. Refined carbs cause spikes and eventual shortfalls in blood glucose. Eat proteins and not refined carbs before a big test or when you really need to be sharp and alert. Carbs dull the thinking process and blanket the peptides we talked about earlier.

*Neurological function begins with digestion!*

Your thoughts can careen out of control without a good supply of Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs) which are found in abundance in fish, eggs, nuts and seeds. Chronic EFA deficiency is implicated in the growing prevalence of brain disorders (i.e. Tourettes, ADD/ADHD, autism, depression, hyperactivity, inattentiveness and other disorders), as well as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other diseases.

When you feel hungry, try drinking some water to see if the sensation goes away. If it is indeed hunger, then you have a good start on your digestion with the water you just imbibed! Without water, your digestion is adversely affected and your brain cannot function properly.

Eat slow and relaxed. This will give you more time to chew the food, mix it with enzymes from the saliva and improve your overall digestion. When you eat slower the brain has more time to keep up with the peptide signals that tell you when you have eaten enough.

Establish new habits when the urge for comfort foods comes up. Do positive activities that organize the brain, like taking a brisk walk with the arms swinging, jumping jacks or bicycling. Doing complex math problem or spelling words backwards, counting backwards and skip-counting can help logics take control when you are emotional.

*Eat like a king for breakfast, a prince for lunch and a pauper for supper.*

It comes down to a battle for the mind. Eat for the purpose of supporting a healthy body and mind. Eating for emotional fulfillment leaves you where you started emotionally, and maybe a bit too full.

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