

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at M3.

## Emotional Eating

Food is commonly used as a coping mechanism for sadness, depression and anger, however, eating to suppress feelings not only sabotages efforts to lose weight, it eventually leads to weight gain and more depressed feelings. Emotional eaters can get back on track if they figure out what triggers are causing their need to eat. Here's how.

### Food and Emotions

Traumatic events such as losing a job, divorce, the death of a loved one, health problems and stress at work can lead to emotional eating. Since some foods trigger the release of mood-elevating hormones (chocolate), the body craves these foods when the mind feels down in the dumps.

Food also serves as a distraction from the real problems facing an emotional eater's life. For instance, if an individual is worried about a big presentation at work or just had a fight with a spouse, comfort foods can calm nerves and suppress feelings of anxiety. Instead of worrying about the problems, the eater is fixated on the positive feeling of eating. Yet, once done eating, the emotional eater focuses not only on their problems again but also on how much they overate. This leads to more grief in the long run.

### Characteristics of an Emotional Eater

- Eating when feeling strong emotions such as anger and depression caused by an event unrelated, or eating when bored
- Becoming incredibly hungry without warning
- Craving specific foods (usually unhealthy), such as chocolate, pasta or candy, and not being satisfied by any other foods
- Cravings are felt in the mouth and in the mind; the stomach is not hungry
- Eating absent-mindedly, as if someone else is feeding the eater forcefully
- Cannot stop eating even when full

### Gaining Control of Emotional Eating

*Learn to identify real hunger:* If the eater ate only a few hours prior and their stomach is not rumbling in response to hunger, then they probably should not eat.

*Identify triggers:* Eaters should keep a food journal and write down everything that they eat, how they felt emotionally right before they ate and how they felt when they were done eating. It is also beneficial to note how hunger played into the eating. Then, analyze what emotions

accompanied food intake to determine what is causing the need to eat.

### *Find comforts outside of food:*

Pick up a hobby, try watching a movie, listen to music, take a walk or visit a friend instead of eating when you feel particularly blue.

*Remove unhealthy foods from the home:* If junk food is not there, you can't eat it.

*Snack smart:* Instead of reaching for unhealthy foods when feeling hungry, eat a piece of fruit or vegetables.

*Eat a balanced diet:* In general, emotional eaters should try to eat a balanced diet so as to not give in to emotional eating later on.

Instead of getting angry after eating emotionally, move on from the experience and identify the issues that caused the need to eat. Tackle those problems, and emotional eating will pass.

## Did You Know...?

Emotional eating is a common psychological problem, especially for women. To curb this issue, the root of why someone eats must be detected before the eating will stop.