

Consumer Health: Is emotional eating sabotaging your weight-loss efforts?

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You know losing that extra weight would be good for your health. Your health care team talked with you about how obesity increases your risk of other health issues, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood

pressure and certain types of cancer. They even worked out a healthy eating plan, and you want to stick to it. And you do well for many days, but then something upsetting happens, and your first thought is food.

Emotional eating is eating to suppress or soothe [negative emotions](#), such as stress, anger, fear, boredom, sadness and loneliness. Food also can be a distraction. If you're worried about an upcoming event or stewing over a conflict, for instance, you may focus on eating comfort food instead of dealing with the painful situation.

Emotional eating often leads to eating too much, especially overeating foods that are sweet, fatty and high in calories. And this can sabotage your weight-loss efforts.

When negative emotions threaten to trigger [emotional eating](#), try these nine tips to stay on track:

1. Keep a food diary. Write down what you eat, how much you eat, when you eat, how you're feeling when you eat and how hungry you are. Over time, you might see patterns that reveal the connection between mood and food.
2. Tame your stress. If stress contributes to your emotional eating, try a stress management technique, such as yoga, meditation or deep breathing.
3. Have a hunger reality check. Is your hunger physical or emotional? If you ate just a few hours ago and don't have a rumbling stomach, you're probably not hungry. Give the craving time to pass.
4. Get support. You're more likely to give in to emotional eating if you lack a good support network. Lean on family and friends, or consider joining a support group.
5. Fight boredom. Instead of snacking when you're not hungry, distract yourself and substitute a healthier behavior. Take a walk,

watch a movie, play with your pet, listen to music, read, surf the internet or call a friend.

6. Remove temptation. Don't keep hard-to-resist comfort foods in your home. And if you feel angry or blue, postpone your trip to the grocery store until your emotions are in check.
7. Don't deprive yourself. When trying to lose weight, you might limit calories too much, eat the same foods repeatedly and banish treats. This may just increase your food cravings, especially in response to emotions. Eat satisfying amounts of healthier foods, enjoy an occasional treat and get plenty of variety to curb cravings.
8. Snack healthy. If you feel the urge to eat between meals, choose a [healthy snack](#), such as [fresh fruit](#), vegetables with low-fat dip, nuts or unbuttered popcorn. Or try lower-calorie versions of your favorite foods to see if they satisfy your craving.
9. Learn from setbacks. If you have an episode of emotional eating, forgive yourself and start fresh the next day. Try to learn from the experience and plan for how you can prevent it in the future. Focus on the [positive changes](#) you're making in your [eating habits](#) and give yourself credit for making changes that will lead to better health.

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