

CHANGE UNWANTED EATING HABITS

If you only eat when you're hungry, and you stop when you're satisfied, go ahead and skip this lesson. If food were only for fuel, we'd all be at a healthy weight and have a peaceful relationship with food. *But most of us don't only eat for energy.* And honestly, nor should we.

As humans, we are emotional, and it's natural and normal to attach emotion to food. It's also natural and normal to eat emotionally from time to time. It's normal to want specific foods for comfort from time to time, or to eat a second helping just because it tastes so darn good!

But...the poison is in the dose. If you find yourself late night snacking every night, mindlessly nibbling and snacking throughout the day, are overly excited to go to Costco just so you can sample the foods, or consistently need a sugary, blended coffee drink each afternoon, *and you want to change*, this lesson is for you. You are ready to progress toward a more peaceful relationship with food.

What to expect:

- ✓ A lot of ups and downs. Overcoming emotional eating is not a linear process.
- ✓ Never to be 'perfect'. We are emotional beings and it would be silly to try to 'use food only for fuel'. But we want to trend toward a healthy relationship with food so that we have alternative ways to cope with our feelings and to give ourselves what we really need. Remember, the *poison is in the dose*.
- ✓ You may uncover emotions and feelings that you do not want to experience. Honestly, it can be very painful. You may even want to consider working with a counsellor or psychologist.
- ✓ To learn a lot about yourself in the process. Dealing with unwanted eating habits can be a fascinating learning process. Enjoy the process and appreciate the opportunity to learn.
- ✓ To need support of someone who is worthy of listening to you and being in your 'bubble'.

Taking Action: The Transform Your Eating Habits Worksheet

Complete the eating triggers worksheet. ***Do this ahead of time.*** Do not expect yourself or 'will yourself' into avoiding emotional eating. You need to set yourself up for success, which means planning ahead!

Step 1 Identify Triggers:

Triggers may be feelings, or specific situations or times of the day. The good news, is that we are creatures of habit, and you likely experience similar triggers each day. For example, you may find yourself mindlessly snacking or reaching for a glass of wine at

5pm when you come home from work because you need to unwind. Do you eat when you're cold, tired or bored? When you procrastinate? After the kids go to bed? Do you nibble on leftovers when you put them away? Maybe it's when you're lonely after your kids leave to spend the weekend with your ex. Maybe it's after a workout and you feel like you need a reward for your hard work. Perhaps you eat more when you're at a party and you don't know anyone. So often we are not actually aware that we are eating emotionally or mindlessly until the food is gone (then we proceed with feelings of guilt and remorse). That's why it's important to do this exercise ahead of time!

Step 2: What do I need? Why am I eating?

Again, do this ahead of time. In each situation, determine what you really need. After work, maybe you need time to unwind. At a party, maybe you're trying to fill your discomfort of not knowing anyone with food. Maybe you're eating because you're actually hungry. Maybe you're eating because you are trying to be too restrictive with your diet and feel like you may never have the opportunity to eat that food again. Do you nibble when putting away leftovers because 'it doesn't count?'

Awareness is the first step! LOOK AT YOUR FOOD JOURNAL!!!!

Step 3: Come up with alternatives to eating.

Don't think you can just 'stop eating'. Habits don't work that way. We are eating because we *need something*. It's just that eating isn't really what we need. With each trigger, come up with a list of things you can do as an alternative to eating. For example, in the 5pm wine and snack example, maybe you could sit down with a cup of tea and journal. Maybe you could listen to music. If you're procrastinating at work, or are experiencing writers block maybe you could go for a 5-minute walk. If you're triggered when putting away leftovers, maybe you need to remind yourself that you will eat again next time you're hungry. Or, perhaps you'll put away leftovers before you eat your dinner. Use Dr. Michelle May's "101 Things to do Besides Eat" PDF for ideas.

Step 4: Set yourself up for success.

In each situation, what can you do to set yourself up for success? How can you change your environment to support your goals? Maybe it's putting up sticky notes as reminders. Perhaps you need to get rid of the junk food in your pantry so you're not tempted to snack on processed junk. Maybe you could buy a few new types of tea to indulge in. If passing your favourite drive through triggers you, change your driving route.

In the moment:

Here are a few tips to practice in the moment:

1. Identify and allow yourself to feel the emotion. For example "I feel sad". You do not have to fix negative emotions.

2. Before you eat, ask yourself “What do I need right now?” We often eat because we are HUNGRY- but hungry for pleasure, connection, love, etc. Are you physically hungry? What would be truly satisfied at this time?
3. If you decide to eat when you’re not hungry, do it but DECIDE to do it. Give yourself permission. Put the food on a plate, sit down and eat it mindfully.
4. Give yourself credit! Celebrate each success. Learn from ‘mistakes’. Be prepared for a long road ahead. You are worth it.

Books I highly recommend:

1. Eat what you love, Love what you eat, Michelle May
2. Women, Food and God, Geneen Roth
3. MindBody Nutrition, Marc David (also has a great podcast at the Institute for the Psychology of Eating)

Podcasts:

1. Fit and Vibrant You Podcast Episode 6: End of Emotional Eating
2. Fit and Vibrant You Podcast Episode 5: Mindful Eating