



Six strategies to combat 'out-of-control' eating

#1. ASK YOURSELF, "ARE YOU AN EMOTIONAL EATER?"

Emotional eating is the troublesome use of food to take care of emotional needs (to manage stress, boredom, anxiety, anger, loneliness, etc.). Here's how emotional eating works...

Food and "food thoughts" are used as distractions from uncomfortable feelings. For example... you have a fight with a family member or with your boss. Suddenly, you find yourself thinking about the chocolate candy in the cupboard or in the candy machine down the hall. As soon as you start thinking about the chocolate, you are no longer focused on how angry you feel. People use food thoughts and food because doing so helps them manage their mood.

#2. RECOGNIZE "EMOTIONAL EATING"

When you reach for food, ask yourself, "Am I turning to food to meet a physical need--am I really hungry? Or, am I focusing on food to avoid feeling bored, stressed, angry, lonely, etc.?"

#3. STOP DIETING AND STOP WEIGHING YOURSELF!

Diets don't work! Food restriction sets an emotional eater up for more emotional eating... and the scale makes people crazy! Why give a scale that kind of power. Get rid of it. (If you absolutely must monitor your ups and downs, the fit of your clothes will tell you everything you want to know.)

#4. EXPLORE WHY YOU ARE SO OBSESSED WITH WEIGHT

Does this sound familiar? "If I could just lose weight, I'd be happy." Think about that. Is your life really that simple or one dimensional? Or, is it possible that your focus on your weight gives you an illusion of control? Blaming all of life's disappointments on weight, body shape or size, can feel safer than taking a good, long, honest look at other life issues-like your relationship skills, your feelings about emotional and/or sexual intimacy, personal or career change, etc.

#5. DEVELOP NEW SKILLS AND HEALTHIER COPING STRATEGIES

The use of food to manage mood is a self-reinforcing behavior. Somewhere along the way (consciously or unconsciously), you tried it and it worked. You learned that it worked; therefore, it became a habit.

The good news is you can now consciously learn new, healthier habits for emotional regulation (take a class, hire a coach, or work with a counselor who specializes in emotional eating and mood regulation issues).

#6. SHIFT YOUR FOCUS TO SELF-CARE

Develop an extensive Self-Care List. On it, list everything you can think of that gives you pleasure. (If you can't think of anything, explore new strategies. Ask other people what they do to manage stress, to self-nurture, and to have fun.)

Carry the list around with you. Pull it out every time you're tempted to use food to meet an emotional need. Eventually, these new habits that you're developing will begin to replace the old emotional eating habit and will feel much better in both the short and long runs.

For lasting behavioral change to occur, the focus must shift from dieting and weight loss--to self-care and a desire for improved health, eating well and being fit. Remember, dieting and deprivation are traps for an emotional eater. Self-Care is the way out.

By Ellen Shuman

ABOUT ELLEN SHUMAN

Ellen Shuman is the founder and Exec. Director of the WellCentered Eating Disorder Treatment Programs & www.aweighout.com, which conducts phone coaching & groups about Emotional Eating to people worldwide. A Peabody/Emmy Award winning journalist, Shuman entered the wellness field in 1992 following an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show. Today, she speaks nationally on the subjects of emotional eating, body image & size-ism.

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