



## EMOTIONAL EATING:

# Kick It to the Curb

Family issues, a stressful day at work, or just feeling down? We've all been there. Everyday can't be a great day but sometimes overwhelming emotions can trigger less than healthy behaviors like emotional eating.

Have you ever wondered why boredom and emotions send you searching through your kitchen for comfort food? According to Harvard Health, lots of people who eat emotionally do it to feel better. Indulging in comfort foods can solicit feelings of relief, calmness, or even happiness. No wonder emotional eating is such an easy habit to fall into—but it often comes at a cost.

Have you noticed that your pants are a little tight or that you feel sluggish after eating comfort foods for a while? That's because many of the foods that you probably eat when you're feeling emotional aren't the healthiest options. There's a reason people reach for ice cream, takeout, and other high calorie, low nutrient dense foods after experiencing a stressful or emotional situation. Emotional eating often centers around foods that taste great but aren't great for you.

Eating when you're bored can be just as problematic as emotional eating. Instead of negative emotions sending you into an eating frenzy, you might find yourself cramming chips into your mouth just because you're bored. Studies show that we do this because eating



exciting foods distracts us from boredom. And we don't reach for healthy foods when we're bored unless we think they're exciting.

Healthy eating habits are important for maintaining a healthy weight and overall health. If you suspect your eating habits fluctuate based on your emotions or boredom, the best thing you can do is start tracking your eating habits with a food & mood journal.

## KEEPING A FOOD & MOOD JOURNAL

You can keep a food journal in a note on your phone, in a notebook, or in an app. Choose whatever works best for you.

- Take notes every time you eat something. Answer a few basic questions:
  - What are you eating?
  - When are you eating?
  - Which emotion(s) did you feel before you ate?
  - How did you feel while you were eating?
  - Did your emotional state change once you finished eating? How?
- After a few days to a week, read over your journal. Do you notice any patterns? If your eating habits change with certain emotions or boredom, they're your triggers for unhealthy eating.
- Make a plan to help you make healthy choices around eating, even when you're feeling bored or emotional. Consider talking to a mental health professional to help you work through these challenges.



### FOLLOW THE MOUSE:

We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'VE GOT THE BLUES

Everyone feels emotional at times—it's normal. It's what makes us human. However, we shouldn't let the way we feel determine what we eat. The best way to avoid eating unhealthy foods when you're feeling emotional or bored is to have a plan. Here are 3 things you can do when you've got the blues:

### 1. MEAL PLAN IN ADVANCE

If you cook your meals in advance based on your health goals, you'll have plenty of healthy meals and snacks to choose from when you're hungry, bored, or feeling emotional. Just make sure to prep meals and snacks that you will be excited to eat.

### 2. GET TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Figure out what's triggering your emotional eating. Keep a food & mood journal, talk to a therapist, or confide in a close friend or family member. Whatever you choose should help you to identify which emotions are sending you searching for comfort foods.

### 3. FIND PRODUCTIVE WAYS TO EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS

Figure out healthy ways to process how you're feeling. Some people write down their feels in a diary, others make art, exercise, or spend time with loved ones. What works for someone else may not work for you, so you'll have to dig deep to find something that helps you express yourself.

You don't have to go at it alone. Cook County has several resources that can help you navigate emotional eating. There's plenty of information about healthy eating habits on



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#### Healthy Snacks to Keep You on Track

1. Fresh whole fruit and veggies
2. Apple slices with peanut butter
3. Rice cakes
4. Roasted nuts
5. Cheese and crackers
6. Smoothies

**Take charge and make positive changes to promote a healthier lifestyle and overall well-being.**



SOURCES: [Harvard.edu](#), [NIH.gov](#)