

# ENDING EMOTIONAL EATING

## Introduction

- Emotional eating, despite being stereotyped as funny, is a serious issue.
- Its symptoms include :
  - **Mindless Eating** - May eat food but not taste it or realise what you are doing.
  - **Feeling of Guilt and Shame**
    - People feel embarrassed or hateful of themselves.
    - These negative feelings make them to eat more for comfort.
  - **Eating in Secret** - People eat “naughty” foods in private for fear of embarrassment.
  - **Always on mind...** - Constantly thinking about food (food obsession).
  - **Feeling Sick**
    - Overeating for comfort can make a person feel sick.
    - But for emotional overeaters, this may not stop them from another meal.
- Could your weight gain be the result of emotional overeating (as opposed to just overeating)?
  - **Seemingly Unexplainable Weight Gain**
    - You may gain weight even after working out regularly and having proper meals.
    - This can be due to mindless emotional overeating.
  - **A Sudden Urge**
    - Emotional hunger comes as a sudden urge to eat food.
    - True hunger, on the other hand, comes gradually.
  - **Depression** - If you think of your favourite food while feeling depressed, your eating is probably emotion-based.
  - **Stress** - Stress causes anxiety and other negative feelings which lead to emotional overeating.
  - **Guilt** - Feeling ashamed or guilty on overeating is a sign of emotional overeating.
  - **Specific Cravings** - People with emotional overeating crave for particular food to satisfy their hunger than having a variety of options.

# Chapter 1 - What Causes Emotional Eating?

- Emotional overeating disorder refers to any of various eating habits where genuine hunger is not the motivational factor.
- More common in women than men.
- Causes:
  - **Past Trauma**
    - Sexual abuse can lead to anxiety and confusion.
    - People thus move to overeating to comfort these negative feelings.
    - A 'fatter' body makes them feel protected from opposite sex.
  - **Poor Self-Image**
    - People who suffer from low self-esteem and a negative self-image may seek escape by overeating.
  - **Self-Medication**
    - People unconsciously use food as a drug to prevent emotional pain.
  - **Depression**
    - Mentioned in introduction
    - Ironically, as depression increases people tend to lose weight due to loss of appetite.
  - **Stress**
    - Stress stimulates body to produce Cortisol hormone.
    - Cortisol has a hunger-stimulating effect leading to overeating.
  - **Identify your triggers**
    - Emotional - Eating to relieve boredom, stress, or as a way to overcome relationship problems.
    - Psychological - eat in response to negative, self-destructive thoughts.
    - Environmental – eat because of an opportunity such as while reading or watching TV.

# Chapter 2 - How to eat to stop emotional overeating?

- As a first step, **be honest with yourself** and accept that you have a problem.
  - Consult a therapist or specialist to confirm if you are a victim.
- **Keep a food diary.**
  - Note everything you eat and how you feel when you eat – sad, joyful etc.
  - Don't judge yourself or change food habits while making this diary.
  - After few weeks, a pattern will emerge.
- **Update your Grocery List**
  - Brown rice
  - Millet
  - Fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Low-fat, low-calorie yogurt
  - Popcorn kernels for air popping
  - Lean protein like fish, turkey, and chicken
  - Natural, healthy cooking oils like olive and safflower oil
- **Don't Crash Diet**
  - Crashing your diet will urge you to eat even more after the diet.
  - Instead, use the following tips :
    - Allow yourself to eat one of your 'naughty' foods, say frozen yogurt, once at the end of the week as a treat.
    - Boost your nutrition with good quality vitamins and minerals.
    - Increase consumption of nutrient-dense food.
- **Eat Regular Meals**
  - Way to combat overeating.
  - Helps to deliberate intake of nutritious food.
  - Tends to make a more relaxed eating experience.

# Chapter 3 - Lifestyle Choices: First Step to Overcome Emotional Eating

- Make specific lifestyle changes to overcome overeating.
- Setbacks are not unusual. Take a fresh start again.
- Changes:
  - **Exercise**
    - Exercise 3-5 times a week.
    - With at least 20 minutes of cardiovascular exercise followed by light toning and weight training.
    - Exercise relieve emotional overeating :
      - i. Produces endorphins which are 'feel good' hormones.
      - ii. Prevents boredom and mindless eating.
      - iii. Boosts self esteem.
  - **Nature**
    - In natural realm, there is no media to lower your esteem.
    - Allows you to connect with natural foods.
  - **Alternative Stress Relief** – Like yoga, meditation, martial arts etc.
  - **Swap Goodies for Goodies**
    - Find alternatives to substitute food while feeling different emotions.
    - Like a short walk, reading magazines, doing nails etc.
  - **Why am I doing this?**
    - Before eating, ask yourself do you really feel hungry in the stomach.
    - If not, try to avoid it.

# Chapter 4 – Nutritional Treatments

We may not eat the healthiest foods while overeating. You become full and there's no room left for the good stuff.

## Nutritional Deficiencies

- Deficiencies might bring on cravings.
- The need is emotional but it may also be physical.
- Eg: Craving for ice cream may signify need for calcium.
  
- **Vitamin D**
  - Suggested for people suffering from certain depressive disorders
    - Cod liver oil
    - Sockeye salmon
    - Soymilk (fortified with Vitamin D)
    - Cow's milk
  
- **B-complex Vitamins**
  - increase energy levels and manage water retention
    - Yogurt
    - Eggs
    - Lean beef
    - Dark leafy greens
  
- **Magnesium and Calcium**
  - Manage muscle and nerve tension
    - Beans
    - Nuts (peanuts, hazelnuts, pecans)
    - Corn
  
- **ZINC**
  - Many people with eating disorders are deficient in this mineral
    - Shellfish(oysters and crab)
    - Beef, particularly beef shanks
    - Pork
    - Chicken
    - Garbanzo beans

Plan meals and make a shopping list, be proactive about meeting nutritional needs.

# Chapter 5 – Alternative Therapies

Emotional overeating can make a person feel imprisoned - no way out of the cycle of feeling sad, angry, anxious, and eating to alleviate the emotional pain.

Alternate Treatments:

- **Hypnosis**
  - It is effective because it addresses the mind directly with the power of suggestion.
  - It is not mumbo-jumbo stuff of cartoons and swinging pocket watches but a clinical practice
- **Meditation**
  - The intent is to "tune in" to the emotional thought center that is driving cravings.
  - Meditation takes a form called "mindfulness".
- **Herbal Supplements**
  - Hoodia - Effective at appetite suppression and boosting energy.
    - Its effects tend to be subtle.
  - Vitex - Hormone-balancing herb for women helps those whose emotional overeating is influenced by hormone fluctuations.
  - Ginseng - Help sugar cravings and curb the compulsion to overeat in response to one's emotions.
- **Acupuncture**
  - More successful with treating emotional overeating than just overeating.
  - Acupuncture's ability to release endorphins and boost metabolism is responsible.
- **Nutrition**
  - Right balance of vitamins and minerals.
  - Opt for fresh, whole foods
  - Take a vitamin and mineral supplement that is formulated for gender and life situation.

# Chapter 6 – Weight Loss Surgery

- **Lap-Band**

- Silicon ring is placed around the top of the stomach, leaving a small pouch above the ring.
- Here the food goes first and the pouch fills up quickly.
- Person feels full on less food, in other words.
- The doctor can inject/remove saline into/from the ring in order to inflate/deflate it and decrease/increase the pouch's capacity
- **Pros:**
  - Adjustable
  - Digestive process is not compromised
  - The surgical procedure is done laproscopically
- **Cons:**
  - Additional surgery may be required in the case of complications.
  - Weight loss is slow and gradual.
  - Repeated follow-up visits with your doctor.

- **Gastric Bypass**

- It is a mal-absorptive technique.
- A small pouch is created at top of the stomach using "staples".
- Then part of the small intestine is re-routed to connect to this pouch, creating a permanently smaller stomach.
- **Pros:**
  - Weight loss is significant and permanent.
  - Mild side effects resolve easily.
- **Cons:**
  - Patients are required to take supplements to prevent nutritional deficiency.
  - Dumping syndrome
  - Harder for doctors to view stomach and intestine via endoscopy thus many diseases can go undetected.

Weight loss surgery can help with the weight gain and excessive caloric intake, but it does not address the emotional issues.

# Conclusion

Emotional overeating can seem like a prison with no way out.

## Common Treatments

Recognize your problem:

- Counselling - It involves some nutritional and dietary guidelines and treatment.
- Surgery - Addresses the physical aspect of the problem rather than the emotional but, in combination with emotional therapy.
- Medication - Medications - usually anti-depressants - provide relief for many who suffer from emotional overeating.

## Extra Tips

- Exercise regularly - Improves mood, energy levels, and self-image
- Eat well - Keep fresh produce on hand and eat lots of lean protein, veggies, fruits, and whole grains.

## What Not to Do

- Keep unhealthy snacks handy - Make it hard on yourself to get the foods you want to eat when feeling bad.
- Crash diet - Crash dieting tends to result in more overeating afterward.