

Overcoming Emotional Eating

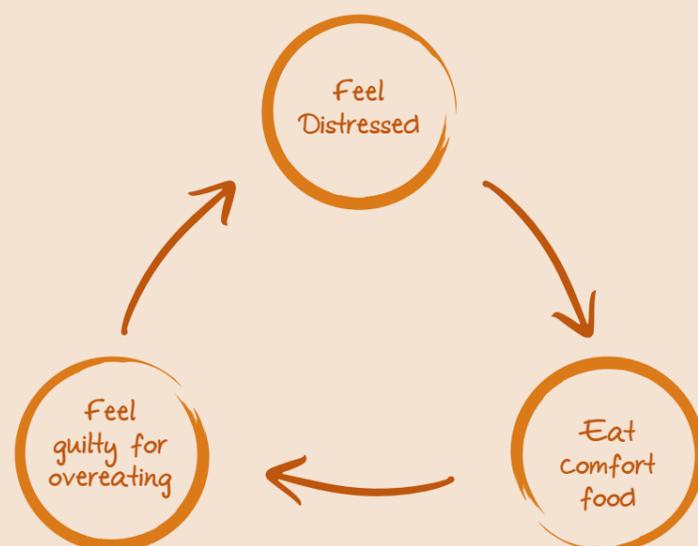
What is emotional eating?

Eating isn't always a response to physical hunger. Many people's eating behaviours are strongly influenced by their emotions. For example, you might turn to food for comfort when feeling stressed or low, or conversely, you may avoid eating when anxious or worried.

Emotional eating is using food to improve your emotional state, to fulfil an emotional need. However, in the long term, it often leaves you feeling worse.

Can you think of a recent instance when you experienced emotional distress? What happened to your eating pattern during that time?

During periods of emotional distress, the desire to regulate, control, or numb intense feelings is common. This is why many people turn to food for comfort. Eating can provide an escape from unpleasant situations, but it often results in feelings of guilt and shame, as well as mindless eating.



Binge Eating

Binge eating involves losing control over eating, often resulting in consuming large portions of food in one sitting and an inability to stop. This leads to intense feelings of disgust, guilt, and shame, which may trigger a desire to compensate, such as through over exercising, restricting food intake, or purging.

Overeating is a normal and common behaviour that everyone engages in from time to time, such as during holidays, dining out with friends, or when enjoying exceptionally delicious food. The key distinction between overeating and binge eating is that overeating does not involve a feeling of being out of control.

Using your self-monitoring diary, please complete the following activity to gain a better understanding of when you may engage binge eating:

Where and when do you tend to overeat?

Do you feel out of control during these eating episodes?

Now consider your triggers

PHYSICAL:

Had you eaten regularly that day? Had you eaten enough?

PSYCHOLOGICAL:

Had you denied yourself any foods? Were you feeling upset or distressed? In pain, bored, etc?

Now think about after the episode

What do you do afterwards? E.g. Do you deny yourself food in the future?

How do you feel emotionally?

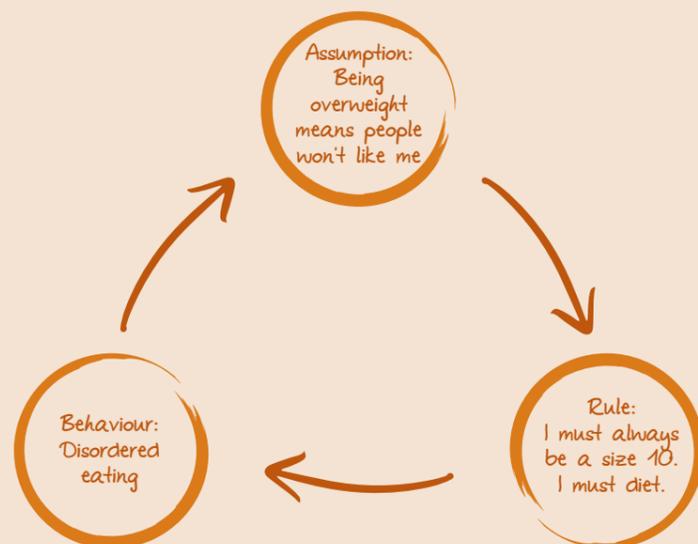
Food Rules

We are constantly bombarded with various diets and messages throughout our lives, especially with the prevalence of social media. It can be incredibly confusing to discern the right choices amid this information overload. As a result, many of us start developing rules, assumptions, and beliefs about what's right and wrong regarding our diets.

Please write down any messages you may have been told about food and dietary rules, and any rules you've created based on those messages. For example, if you were told, 'Eating late at night makes you gain weight,' you might have created a rule like, 'I will not eat after 6 pm.'

The reality is that diets have an extremely low success rate. While some people may initially lose weight, studies show that up to 95% of individuals regain the weight within the following two years. Additionally, rigid dietary rules are not effective for long-term weight control. They are inflexible and fail to account for changing circumstances. When we create strict rules to live by, not adhering to them can lead to feelings of failure.

Rigid rules and assumptions are often learned through trial and error and through observations we have made within our earlier life, and at some point, in our lives they have probably worked or kept us safe, and this means that they can be difficult to change but often they are keeping us trapped in a cycle



Identifying rules and assumptions

You might already have an idea of the rules or assumptions you've developed over the years. In the coming week, we will challenge you to identify any rigid rules. It's important to note that rules can be helpful, but where they become problematic is when they lack flexibility and start limiting your life.

When identifying your rules and assumptions ask yourself?

- What do I expect my diet to look like?
- What standards do I expect of myself?
- What would I find acceptable and not acceptable?

Rules and assumptions come in the form of statements such as:

I must, should, have to always...or else	I must always skip breakfast otherwise or else my metabolism will slow down, and I will gain weight.
If.....Then...	If I don't restrict my diet then I will not fit into my clothes

Take a moment to think of your rules and assumptions:

RULES	ASSUMPTIONS

Over the next week note down your rules and assumptions you notice when you're eating

Challenging your rules and assumptions

Over time, your rules and assumptions may have led to the development of 'feared' foods and eating situations. You might notice that you have fewer foods considered 'safe' to eat and fewer comfortable eating situations. Avoiding specific foods and situations can introduce rigidity into your diet, making it important to grant yourself unconditional freedom to eat, fostering a varied and flexible diet.

When you experience fears related to particular foods or eating situations, it's crucial to challenge those thoughts. Often, when you've endured eating distress for an extended period, your thoughts about certain foods or situations can become overwhelming. Take some time to reflect on the foods or eating situations you avoid and the reasons behind your avoidance.

THINGS I AVOID	ANXIETY LEVELS (1-10)	PREDICTION: What do I think would happen if I were to not avoid this?
Bread	8	If i eat bread, I will not be able to stop and this will lead to weight gain
Going out with friends to eat	6	

Challenging your thoughts

Now that you are aware of what situations you are avoiding and your predicted fears, work with your practitioner to set up an experiment to understand. It won't be easy to challenge yourself but choose one prediction at a time and set a challenge that is realistic to achieve.

Step 1: Pick a feared food from your list above, choose one that causes the least anxiety first. (Example: Bread)

Step 2: What is your prediction? Make sure it's very specific so you can test it out. (Example: If i buy a loaf of bread on Saturday, I will have no control and will eat it all in one go)

Step 3: Behavioural experiment. What will you do to test out your prediction? (Example: I will buy a loaf of bread every Saturday for the next 4 weeks.)

Step 4: Evaluate. What happened? (Example: I did eat the loaf the first Saturday, but the next Saturday I just ate a couple of slices. By the 4th Saturday I didn't care)

Step 5: Reflect? What did I learn? What are my anxiety levels now?

Step 6: REPEAT. It's important to note that your rules did not develop overnight, and that rules and assumptions can be stubborn, sometimes experiments can also go wrong, this does not mean you have failed, it just means your might need to change the experiment or keep pushing through trying other options.

Top ten tips for improving your eating

1. Recognize binge eating episodes.
2. Identify your triggers for overeating.
3. Understand your emotional eating cycle.
4. Discover and question any dieting rules or beliefs.
5. Examine assumptions about avoided foods.
6. Challenge yourself to change.
7. Keep a record of avoided foods.
8. Conduct behavioural experiments as your own scientist.
9. Reflect on reintroducing foods.
10. Be proud of challenging your rules.

Meal Structure & Review

Week Start	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Meal 1							
Meal 2							
Meal 3							
Snack 1							
Snack 2							
Other Eating Episodes							
What went well?	Challenges:			My positive quote:			
Goal of the week:							

Emotional Food Diary

Example Food Diary

When? Date/Time	Who were you with? What were you doing?	What did you eat?	Triggers identified	Thoughts/feelings prior to eating	B/L/P	Thoughts after event?

My Week in Review

What went well with my eating behaviours this week:

Any behaviours which need my attention:

What I will focus on next week:



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