



Stop Stress from Making You Eat!

LiveLifeWell

If you eat when you're feeling emotional, you may find yourself eating for other reasons, such as dealing with stress. Check out some reasons people eat when stressed, followed by ways to help you combat emotional or stress eating!

Common Triggers to Stress Eating

- **Cortisol Cravings:** When you're under stress, your body is likely producing higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone that tends to make people crave sweet and salty food – the stuff that's generally not good for us.
- **Social Eating:** People under stress often seek social support, which is a great way to relieve stress. Unfortunately, when people get together, we tend to eat. While eating with friends can make you feel better in the short term, you may regret it later.
- **Nervous Energy:** When stressed, anxious or nervous, many people just need something for their mouth to do. This often leads to eating or drinking when you're not even hungry.
- **Stuffing Emotions:** Another reason many people eat is to quiet uncomfortable emotions. Food can take the focus off of anger, resentment, fear, anxiety, and a host of other emotions we'd rather not feel.
- **Childhood Habits:** Whether your parents celebrated your successes with a favorite meal or helped fix a boo-boo with sweets, you probably developed some emotionally-based attachments to food while growing up.

Healthy Alternatives to Stress Eating

- **Cope In Healthy Ways:** Many people use food to deal with uncomfortable emotions, but there are healthier ways to cope:
 - **Exercise.** Moving your body is a great way to blow off steam and get your endorphins going, and is a much healthier option than overeating.
 - **Talk to a Friend.** Social support can go a long way when you're feeling stressed. (Just try to talk somewhere other than a restaurant!)
 - **Try Journaling:** Processing your feelings in a journal has many health benefits, including stress management. When you feel like reaching for unhealthy food, reach for a pen instead.
- **Try Healthier Indulgences:** Go ahead and indulge once in a while – but try healthier things. Drink sparkling water instead of soda, munch on veggies instead of chips, savor a piece of dark chocolate instead of a whole chocolate muffin. And set aside a portion of food before you begin eating. This will help you combat the urge to overeat!
- **Face Your Problems:** If you're using food to muffle your feelings in a relationship, try assertiveness instead. If you can face the stresses in your life, you won't need food to help you cope.
- **Find Relaxation Techniques:** Learning to relax your body and mind can have a positive impact on your stress level and the foods you eat!
 - **Breathe Deep:** If you can't walk away from a stressful situation, you can try breathing exercises. Take a few deep breaths and really focus on the flow of air as you inhale and exhale. Breathing exercises are great because you can do them anytime or anywhere!
 - **Take a Mental Break:** Close your eyes – even if only for a few minutes – and visualize something peaceful or picture yourself in a relaxing place.
 - **Try Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a technique where you tense and release all of your muscle groups, leaving your body feeling more relaxed. With practice you can release virtually all tension in a matter of seconds!

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