

## What Is At The Core Of Your Emotional Eating?

As a registered dietitian I find that most people struggle with consuming too many carbs, especially refined and processed ones. Of course I'm supposed to counsel my clients to consume less bread, cereal, rice, pasta, cookies, crackers, cakes, donuts, chips, bagels, tortillas, waffles, pancakes, fries, pizza, soda, sports drinks, and candy. All of these foods and beverages are digested into sugars which can play havoc with your health. Blood sugar levels rise, insulin production is amped up, and anything extra gets stored as fat – right in the belly. That's the logical part. The scientific part. So why can't we "just do it"?

To say that our relationship with food is complex is an understatement, especially when it comes to weight loss. If it was easy, I would put on my dietitian and hat and tell you how many carbs, proteins, and fats you should be eating. You'd lose the weight and keep it off, and we'd be done. But, as I'm sure you already know, it doesn't quite work that way!

### Our Relationship with Food is Quite Complex

The reality is that there is SO much emotion and psychology behind our eating and if we don't take the time to understand this – and embrace it and heal it – then we aren't likely to experience success in permanently releasing the weight. Another truth bomb: It's not about the food.

Pause for a moment and think about your relationship with food. Was there enough food or did you have to fight for it or go hungry? Was your food ever restricted because someone put you on a diet? When you learned to use the potty or you did good in school were you rewarded with candy? If you had a bad day were you comforted with a cookie? Did you get a "treat" if you ate all your dinner? Were you lonely and food was your friend? To say the least the ways we used food are confusing.

### Food and Your Brain

Food is also very often used as a coping tool that works to tranquilize painful emotions or keep you numb. If your childhood was chaotic and stressful, you may have subconsciously learned that carbohydrate foods and beverages (remember the list from above) beverages like bread, cereal, pasta, somehow made you feel better. And it's not just because they tasted good. These sugary foods affect your brain chemistry by increasing your serotonin and dopamine levels – the "feel-good" chemicals that help you feel calm and happy or excited and motivated.

### What If You Just Need "Something"?

To discover more about YOUR relationship with food, start by asking yourself the following questions when you find yourself headed to the pantry or the fridge because you just need "something":

1. What are you REALLY craving? To answer this question, try tuning in to how your FEELINGS and EMOTIONS? Are you are tired, overwhelmed, angry, lonely, or anxious? Very often what we're craving is relief from these feelings.
2. If you weren't "allowed to eat this food", how would you FEEL? Many of my clients share that they would feel angry, sad or deprived.
3. Are you truly physically hungry?

I know from very personal experience that are cravings and emotional eating have little, if anything, to do with physical hunger. For me it meant bingeing on a huge bowl of popcorn at 8:30 pm – when dinner was at 7. It meant eating corn chips out of the bag at 9:30 in the morning – as I was getting ready for work. It meant stopping to buy raw cookie dough on the way home from work because I'd had a hard day. It also meant eating the entire carton before I got home so that nobody would know what I had done). It also meant feeling frustrated and embarrassed and ashamed and hopeless.

### **Are Cravings and Emotional Eating an Issue for You?**

To find out if cravings and emotional eating are issues for you, I warmly invite you to answer the questions below. Be thoughtful and honest with yourself. You're the only one reading this and your answers can be a good step on the path to healing what's going on at a deeper level.

On a scale of 0-10, zero means "hardly ever" and ten means "all the freaking time".

1. Do you eat when you're stressed or when you have "chaos-brain"? \_\_\_\_\_
  - \* When you're stressed out, your body produces high levels of cortisol which can trigger cravings for salty, sweet, and fried foods.
2. Do you eat when you're not hungry or until you're stuffed? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Emotional eating isn't located in your stomach. You may find yourself "hungry" within an hour of eating or "hungry" all the time.
3. Do you eat to feel better - to calm and soothe yourself? \_\_\_\_\_
  - We often nurture ourselves with food when we're anxious, lonely, or bored because carbs stimulate "feel-good" chemicals in our brains.
4. Do you reward yourself with food? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Childhood patterns with food often carry into adulthood. You may feel like you deserve a treat, especially after a hard day.
5. Do you stuff your emotions with food? \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☒ Numbing yourself with food can be a way to temporarily silence uncomfortable emotions including guilt, anger, resentment, and shame.
6. Does food make you feel safe? Do you feel like food is your friend? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Weight can serve as a protective shield to keep us safe from unwanted attention or to keep us "invisible".
7. Do you feel powerless or out of control around food? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Some foods can be addicting. We may experience intense cravings and once we start eating it may be nearly impossible to stop.

8. Do you eat for entertainment or to relieve boredom? \_\_\_\_\_

- If you feel unfilled and empty, food can be a way to distract you from underlying feelings of dissatisfaction with your life.

### **Discovery Time**

Now, take a look at your answers. Notice the areas where you scored high.

For example, if you realize that stress is a huge trigger for you, use the “press and breathe” technique from Week 1 often. Like several times per day often. This will help you create new neural pathways of “calmness” in your brain instead of fight-or-flight pathways.

If you discovered that you’re using food as a reward, consider some other ways to “treat” yourself that serve your mind and your body for its highest good. Is something really a treat if it harms your health and leaves you feeling bad about yourself in the end?

If you scored high in the area of burying your emotions or numbing the pain with food, take a deeper look inside. Many of my clients struggle with what I called “doormat” energy. If you’re a people pleaser and everyone else’s needs come first, you likely know what I’m talking about. If you’re letting people take from you without refiling your tank through self-care, you’ll likely turn to food to replenish your energy – both physically and emotionally.

Finally, if you’re using food to feel safe or to stay invisible, reach out for help. Many people struggling with weight issues have a history of sexual trauma. As mentioned above, comfort foods (mostly carbs) can increase the levels of serotonin and dopamine in our brains and food becomes a way to self-soothe and comfort. Over time, the extra physical weight becomes a “shield” of sorts, keeping them safe from unwanted attention. A few years ago I had the honor of interviewing Dr. Vincent Felitti, a pioneer in this area. He noticed that as his patients got closer to their goal weights they dropped out of the program. When he conducted exit studies he learned that food was actually the SOLUTION to their deeper issues and that the excess weight was keeping them “safe” from the outside world.

### **Now What?**

Energy healing modalities can help when it comes to resolving the deeper issues behind our emotional eating. EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) tapping is highly effective for decreasing the intensity of painful emotions and can be quite helpful in the healing process. I can also help you release trapped emotions and heart walls that may be blocking your healing. Heart walls are energetic walls that we put up around our hearts to keep us safe from being hurt. These walls can be filled with emotions such as anger, sorrow, grief, shame, betrayal, and so on. Clearing them can be life-changing and can also assist with weight release.

If you’re already enrolled in my 1:1 mentoring program we can use your private sessions for this type of healing. If you are interested in learning more, email me at [excelweightloss@gmail.com](mailto:excelweightloss@gmail.com).

