

# Emotional Eating: How to Support Your Clients Health and Wellness Journey

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## Questions to ask yourself:

Is emotional eating **GOOD or BAD**? How do you support your clients through these challenges?  
How have you typically responded to a client's concerns with Emotional Eating? Or even your own?

## So what exactly is Emotional Eating?

Is it bad?

Stress Eating?

Eating when you are bored?

Eating when you are not physically hungry?

Something you should stop your client from doing?

Eating when you are angry?

## A definition:

"eating to escape, numb, change, or amplify our feelings" Susan Albers, PsyD

"is the practice of consuming large quantities of food -- usually "comfort" or "junk" foods -- in response to feelings instead of hunger" Melissa Conrad Stöppler, MD

"eating for reasons other than physical hunger"

## Is Emotional Eating a lack of willpower problem?

**NO!**

**Why is it not?**

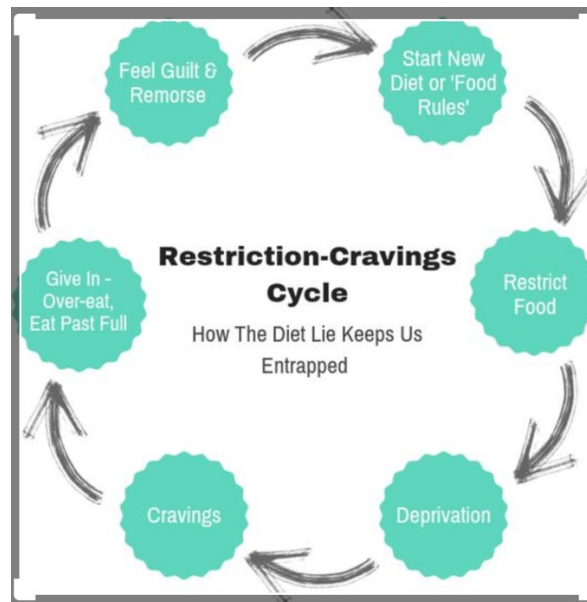
Let's be willing to go beyond the food

What could be going on beneath the surface?

## Underlying Reasons for Emotional Eating

1. Restrictive Diets or "Lifestyle" Nutrition Plans

- labelling foods as bad & good
- low calorie diets/meal plans
- elimination of food groups or certain types of food (ie. sugar, gluten, dairy)
- eating during certain windows of time only
- tracking & monitoring all food consumed



**2. To suppress or soothe negative emotions, such as stress, anger, fear, boredom, sadness and loneliness (Emotions are created from our thoughts and beliefs)**

- Societal views on beauty (body image)
- Feelings of unworthiness or not being “enough”
- Relationship conflicts
- Work or other stressors
- Fatigue Financial pressures
- Health problems Traumatic Experiences

**3. To fill a void**

- Love
- Companionship
- Creativity
- Purpose
- Joy & Passion

**4. To reward or punish**

- Based on how food was modelled or spoken about during childhood
- You scraped your knee – here is a popsicle
- You had a hard day - eat to feel better
- You hurt someone's feelings- no dessert for you

**Let's explore another side of emotional eating – can it be a good thing?**

## **The Gifts in Emotional Eating**

- There is a place where it's doing us a favor
- Food has helped our clients cope, when they had no other tools to help them. They are doing the best they can with what they have
- Our relationship with food has wisdom to share with us
- It's trying to talk to us and communicate to us in its own unique language ....Emotional Eating Is Increasing -- Ask Why, Get Curious instead of judgemental
- There's a place where it's trying to get our attention and have us live more consciously

***It is the SYMPTOM - NOT the problem***

***So, trying to "fix" or "control" it doesn't work  
Instead let's ask it what it wants us to know***

What about:

Clients who are constantly dieting or trying to follow a "lifestyle" plan in order to lose weight or become healthier? To control their appetite?

Things to think about:

Are they balanced in macronutrients?

Are they supporting their body's caloric needs? We are not all the same and each day our needs can change

Are they trying to force their body to be a size that it is not destined to be? (Set Point theory)

It's actually being driven by your physiology. It's the wisdom of the body telling you that you need to make some changes and be flexible with where your internal compass is guiding you. We cannot outsmart our body

We have been conditioned since we were a baby to soothe and support ourselves this way – this is a good thing!

**How do you support your clients with their emotional eating challenges?**

**It starts with YOU !**

- Create a safe, non-judgemental space and relationship where your client can speak to you openly
- Explore your own relationship with food and the "food rules" you may or may not be suggesting to your clients based on your own current belief system
- Reflect on your own internal weight stigma bias (we all have one) and educate yourself on research that comes from HAES (Health At Every Size)
- Support your clients in healing from chronic dieting and messaging that comes from diet culture
- Be flexible and adaptable with how you train your client when you connect with them. A person who seeks comfort with food, may need movement/exercise that is gentler to balance their nervous system
- High intensity exercise increases the stress response and if your client de-stresses with food this may increase their pull towards it
- Get to know your client's history with following meal plans and be willing to take a different path than one you typically take your clients on

### **How do you help your client?**

- Encourage honest conversation and normalize that we all emotionally eat
- Teach your client the difference between PHYSICAL hunger and EMOTIONAL hunger

### **Physical Hunger:**

- comes on gradual, can be postponed and is patient
- can be satisfied with any type of food
- based in the stomach
- occurs out of physical need
- once you are full you can stop eating
- causes satisfaction, doesn't cause guilt

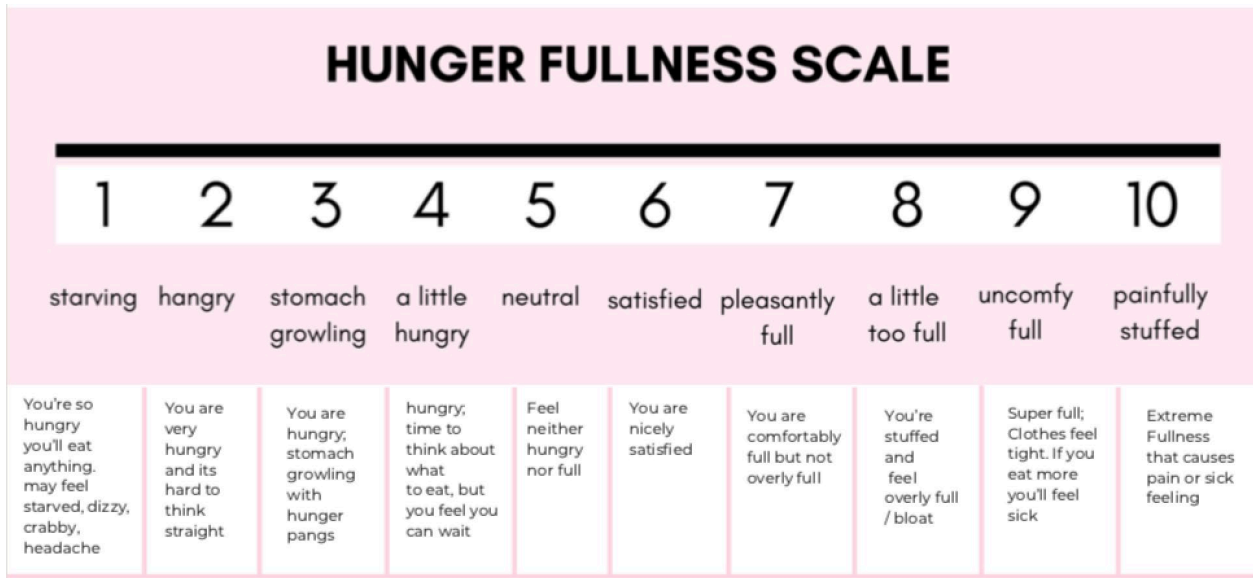
### **Emotional Hunger:**

- comes on suddenly and feels urgent
- causes specific cravings
- "above the neck" in location
- paired with an upsetting emotion and/or to distract
- increased chance of eating past fullness

- feels guilt / shame

## HUNGER/FULLNESS SCALE

This is a great tool to help your clients be in tune with their body cues and important to build trust again



- The desired goal is to help your client gain trust and awareness in their body to respond to their hunger and fullness cues before they get to a 3 and before you hit a 7 or 8. Ideally staying in the 4-6 range.
- The hunger scale can help us to become more in tune with the signals our body is sending us before, during, and after meals
- This is a tool to assist one's relationship with food
- A person may still have times where they eat past fullness or get "hangry" ...we need not feel shame for this

## Mood and Food Journal

- to bring awareness to emotional eating, NOT to track caloric intake
- beneficial to both client and trainer/coach to notice patterns, perspective and to invoke change
- important that they know there will be no judgement, safe environment is key to get real information

### What To Track:

Time of Day:

Where I Am Eating:

Who I Am Eating With:

Feelings When I Started Eating:

Hunger Scale # Upon Starting To Eat - (Provide client with hunger/fullness scale)

What Did I Eat?

Feelings During Eating?

Feelings Immediately After Eating?

Fullness Scale #

Feelings 1 hour After Eating?

Reflection?

You can then reflect on the information TOGETHER and get curious about patterns showing up etc. which can bring important information to the surface

## **When you eat, just eat!**

### **Mindful Eating**

- process-oriented, rather than an outcome-driven, behavior
- focuses on appreciating the experience of food and is not concerned with restricting intake
- mindful eating means being fully attentive to your food — as you buy, prepare, serve, and consume it
- person eating chooses what and how much to consume, from an empowered place (not as a dieter)
- within a mindful approach, the person's choices often are to honour hunger and fullness cues, savor eating more, and select foods consistent with desirable health benefits and pleasure they are seeking
- slow down with food and take 5-10 slow deep breaths before eating to shift into a parasympathetic nervous system, rest and restore
- chew your food, take time to put your fork down and savour the taste of food in your mouth
- calmly acknowledging and accepting your feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations
- by truly paying attention to the food you eat, you may indulge in foods with little to no nutritional benefits less often or not at all (processed foods etc)

### **3 Main Paths to Cope with Feelings *Without Using Food Only***

#### **Self-Care:**

There are many human needs that people often deny, but they are essential for self-care:

- adequate sleep and rest
- pleasure (including sensual)
- expression of feelings, in order to be heard, understood, and accepted
- intellectual and creative stimulation
- comfort and warmth

Great question to ask your client

"Do you often take care of others' needs while ignoring yours? How does that make you feel - perhaps frustrated, resentful, or exhausted?"

#### **Self-Nurturance:**

This goes beyond the basics of self-care It's being EXTRA NICE to yourself How often does your client allow for experiences that provide this?

Asking for hugs  
Playing with pets  
Listening to something soothing  
Reading a book for pleasure  
Enjoying time in nature (forest walks, sitting with a sunset)  
Buying flowers or a small gift for yourself  
Meditation or Massage

### **Learn to Sit with Your Feelings:**

- This can be very challenging and overwhelming to do when you know you are not hungry, or when you are satisfied physically but want to keep eating the delicious food
- Our brain will always seek out pleasure to help us avoid pain (it is it's job) and the path of least resistance -- so seeking food to ease intense emotions is normal
- Our emotions come from our thoughts and beliefs --- are they true? are they someone else's? do we still wish to believe them?
- According to Harvard brain scientist, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, ninety seconds is all it takes to identify an emotion and allow it to dissipate while you simply notice it
- They are NOT good or bad. They just are. Sit with them, Be with them, Instead of trying to fight, numb or suppress them
- Take the time to try and figure out your Emotional Triggers
- Important to PAUSE, take a TIME-OUT, tune into your feelings (try for 5 minutes) (HALT)  
Hungry? Angry? Lonely? Tired?
- This way if you still end up eating for reasons other than physical hunger, a distracted eating experience will turn into one that is more mindful
- Have your client try this exercise next time they want to eat for reasons other than true hunger:
- Before putting any food in your mouth (or more food), set a timer for 5 minutes
- Find a quiet, safe, comfortable space - no distractions
- Explore feelings and emotional triggers you are feeling that might be causing your desire to eat
- What are you feeling right now?

*1. What is it that I am really need at this moment?*

*2. How can I fulfill this need and this feeling without turning to food?*

### **Helpful distractions.... (When you want to eat your feelings)**

- But aren't we suppose to learn how to feel our feelings and develop our emotional muscles?
- Yes! But sometimes we just need a break from feeling all the "feels" and allow them to heal ...like a rest day from the gym 😊
- Find activities to bring yourself pleasure, joy, laughter, a place to rest

### **Final Thoughts & Reminders – What stood out for you today?**

- The more we focus on what we can't have, that is what our mind will want. Why? Our brain cannot process 'negatives' and it's in our nature to want what we are told we cannot have (think back to when you were a child or think of your own child's behaviours)
- If your client is struggling to follow the plan you have set out for them, be open to changing it, exploring it further to see if it's the *best fit* for them

- Our relationship with food is here as our teacher, as a doorway to go through to see what is behind it? If there are challenges and struggles, know that they are the *SYMPTOM*, not the problem
- The feelings of shame and guilt our clients feel for eating the piece of cake are FAR more damaging to their overall health than the actual piece of cake itself -- know this and never forget it!
- We need to feel *SATISFIED* and receive *PLEASURE* from the foods we eat! Be sure your clients are encouraged to ALLOW themselves foods that they enjoy, even if you or they deem it to be unhealthy. Many of our food choices link us to our family, culture and childhood memories. Food serves many purposes beyond the fuel alone
- Encourage your client to seek out a therapist, coach, nutritionist or dietician if you feel they need this additional support. Be sure they feel aligned with the person's approach. Anti-Diet Approaches are becoming more and more common as more eyes are opened up!

### Resources To Support YOU and Your Clients with your food relationship

- EatQ by Susan Albers Eat, Drink, and Be Mindful by Susan Albers
- Breaking Free from Emotional Eating by Geneen Roth
- Food: What the Heck Should I Eat? by Mark Hyman
- Intuitive Eating by Evelyn Tribole
- The Appetite Awareness Workbook by Linda Craighead
- The Diet Cure by Julia Ross Hanger Management by Susan Albers
- Anti-Diet by Christy Harrison
- The F\*ck It Diet by Caroline Dooner
- Health At Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight by Linda Bacon



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