

## Emotional Eating

It has been a really bad day and you reach for a bag of cheese puffs, then chocolate, then a soda. Emotional eating is a habit and like any habit, it can be broken. It may be difficult, especially if you have been doing it a long time, but it is possible.

Here are some tips to help you and family curb your emotional eating.

- **Set up a Healthy Home Environment.** If there are no junk foods in the house, you can't binge on them. Instead, keep low-calorie, low-fat foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, hummus, nuts and unbuttered popcorn available for munching.
- **Be a Good Role Model for Healthy Eating.** Kids are learning from adults, so parents and grandparents need to create a healthier food environment. Before going grocery shopping, heading to a fast food restaurant or picking up a pizza, take a breather, go for a walk and wait until your emotions are in check.
- **Identify Triggers that Cause Emotional Eating.** The next time you reach for a cookie, ask yourself, "Why do I want this cookie? Am I really hungry? If not, try to identify what emotions you are feeling. Are you stressed, scared, sad, lonely, upset, or bored? Keep a food diary; a written record of what, how much your mood and when you eat. This may help you to see binge eating patterns or connections between mood and food.
- **Talk With Your Children.** Find out what's going on in their personal lives. Ask about school, friends, and their general attitudes. Do they have a positive or negative view about what is going on in their life right now? Being aware of the underlying social and emotional issues will help you guide them to make better lifestyle choices.
- **Get Help When Needed.** "Aha" moments can create the path for change. If you are having trouble controlling your emotional eating, don't be afraid to seek help from your health professional. Professional counseling or psychotherapy can help adults and youth figure out what's motivating them to overeat or choose unhealthy foods. Counseling can also help those with eating disorders.
- **Find Alternatives that are Satisfying.** Once you figure out why food makes you feel better, you can come up with alternative behaviors that can help you cope with emotional eating. If you find yourself frustrated because you have no control over circumstances, try going for a walk. If you have been hurt by someone by mean comments, get to an exercise class and get rid of the emotional energy and then talk it out.
- **Think Moderation.** Denying yourself all treats can lead to cravings and binge eating. Instead, allow yourself to have your favorite foods occasionally and in smaller portions. Limit the amount of chips by putting a few in a small bowl, instead of eating them out of the bag.
- **Keep the Emphasis on Fun and Feeling Good.** Healthy habits are easier to adopt when people are in a good mood.
- **Celebrate Success.** Focus on the positive changes you are making. Little by little, you will get better results with positive encouragement rather than harsh criticism. Movement will

sometimes go backward, so acknowledge it when it goes in the opposite direction and use the experience to help with future plans.

Source: Rutgers Extension Service