



## Stressed Out and Overeating? Learn to Take Control



Are you in the habit of devouring stacks of cookies or gorging on chips when you're stressed out, anxious, angry, sad or bored? It's common to use food as a way to stuff down or alleviate stress and other uncomfortable emotions. Unfortunately, the "emotional eating" food choices are often loaded with calories, carbohydrates, sugar, salt and/or fat. Here are healthier ways to manage stress and other strong feelings and regain control of your eating habits.

### Break the Emotional Eating Habit

**Identify your personal triggers.** What's causing you to eat when you're not hungry? Is it stress when you're on a deadline? Bored on a weekend? Be specific.

**Plan alternatives to eating when faced with triggers.**

What else can you do instead of eating? Here are some ideas:

- Read, listen to music, go for a walk, exercise, or play a game
- Do housework, yard work, chores, wash the car
- Start (or revive) a hobby
- Follow the "10 minute rule": When you feel the need to eat, wait ten minutes to see if the urge passes
- Write positive notes to yourself
- Drink a glass of water laced with fresh lemon
- Most importantly, make an in-between-meals plan to be prepared if emotional triggers arise

**Develop healthy nutrition and eating habits**

- Learn to recognize real hunger vs. stress eating
- Eat well-balanced meals at set times each day
- Don't eat "family style" with serving bowls set on the table. Instead, dole out individual servings and choose small plates to help control portions
- Have healthy, single-portion snacks, like popcorn, on hand
- Pay attention and eat mindfully. Stress eating is often unconscious. Slow down and savor every bite.

**Try stress management strategies.** Simple techniques can help calm both your body and mind and slow down your reactions, offering healthy ways to alleviate strong emotions. Some examples: yoga, tai chi, and mindfulness meditation that involves focusing on the present moment by turning your attention to your breathing.



**Turn to us!** Your Health Advocate Licensed Professional Counselor can help you identify your overeating triggers, guiding you with strategies to gain better control of both your emotions and eating habits. In a crisis, we're available 24/7.

**HealthAdvocate<sup>SM</sup>**