



# How Our Emotions Influence How We Eat

Resources *for* Living®

# Objectives

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- Define emotional eating
- Look at the food – mood connection
- Identify emotional eating triggers
- Learn strategies to recognize and replace emotional eating
- Review a case study on overcoming emotional eating
- Provide resources for ongoing support



# What is emotional eating?

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A tendency to respond to stressful situations or emotions by eating comfort food, which is typically high in carbohydrates or fats



# The food-mood connection<sup>1</sup>

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**Is there a biological reason for craving comfort foods? The answer to this question is a resounding YES!**

- Carbohydrates help the brain release serotonin which elevates mood and increases feelings of contentment
- Fatty foods tends to relieve a bad mood (in the short term)
- When sleep deprived, unhealthy food triggers the reward center of the brain, making us feel better

<sup>1</sup> Oglethorpe, Alice and Howey, Noelle. [The facts about emotional eating](#). CNN. Accessed February 2018.





## Social connections with food

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- Food as a reward
  - Eat all your dinner – cookies!
  - Sore throat – ice cream!
  - End of a project – pizza party!
  - End of the season – pizza party (yep, again!)
- Social connection
  - Holidays
  - Dinner parties
  - Social gatherings
  - Celebrations

# Emotional triggers

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Certain emotions have a strong link to emotional eating, including:

- Boredom
- Sadness
- Anger
- Frustration
- Guilt



# The cycle of emotional eating



# The food trance

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## **The food trance is an escape state. Bad feelings are transformed into the pleasure of eating<sup>2</sup>**

- Unpleasant or painful emotions are triggered
- Trouble dealing with feelings leads us to look for an escape
- The thinking brain shuts down
- Mindless or emotional eating occurs, typically followed by feelings of guilt or failure



<sup>2</sup>Roth, Geneen. Breaking Free from Emotional Eating. Penguin Publishing Group. 2003.



# Quick assessment

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- Do I eat when feeling stressed, bored, angry, sad, guilty or frustrated in order to reduce these feelings?
- Do I stuff myself with anything that's available?
- When hungry, will only certain foods stop the hunger?
- Do I feel guilty after eating comfort foods?
- Do I regularly overeat carbohydrates or fatty foods?



# A reminder

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Many of us eat emotionally. Problems arise when we:

- Do it frequently to deal with emotions
- Gain weight or are already considered obese or overweight
- Compromise our medical health
- Use it to avoid dealing with our lives



# Changing our emotional eating habits<sup>3</sup>

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## Behavioral interventions

- Record your mood prior to eating
- Set a 20-minute meal timer
- Get an appropriate amount of sleep
- Wait for 30 minutes before eating
- Remove temptation
- Have a cup of tea or glass of water

## Cognitive interventions

- Be compassionate towards yourself
- Connect the dots
- Talk with a counselor to gain self awareness and learn alternate ways of managing your stress and emotions

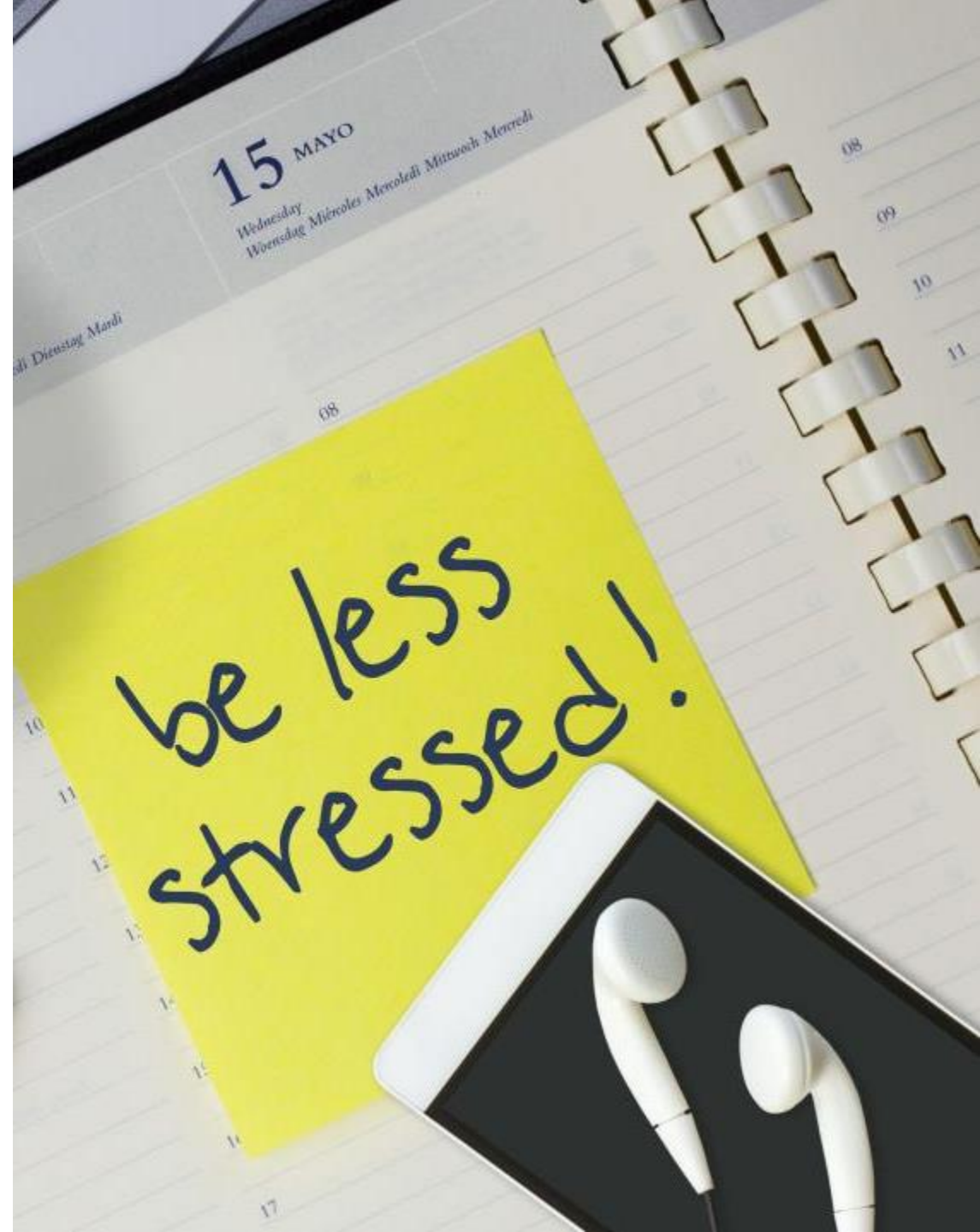
<sup>3</sup>Manning, Joy. [Emotional Eating: What Helps](#). Web MD. Accessed February 2018.

# Manage feelings

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Dealing with feelings starts with:

- Recognizing that emotional eating is a response to stress
- Reassessing the situation and find ways to directly manage it
- Reminding yourself that emotions are fluid and are related to your thoughts and actions
- Managing feelings and stress levels are skills that can be learned



# Manage feelings

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## Learn to identify feelings

- Use word lists
- Pay attention to where the emotion is felt in the body



## Reflect on feelings of sudden hunger

- “Am I really hungry or is this an emotion disguised as hunger?”
- “What can I do right now other than eat?”



## Choose strategies ahead of time

- Create a list of options
- Keep a journal of things that work



## Manage emotions with mindfulness

- Focus on the here and now
- Breathe through it

# Mindful eating

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- Remember that physical hunger likes nutritious, healthy food
- Give yourself permission to leave food on your plate
- Savor each bite
  - See it
  - Smell it
  - Chew it
  - Linger with the taste after swallowing before taking the next bite



# Mindful eating, continued

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- Eat with others, when possible
- Sit down to eat
- Eat without distractions – no television
- Avoid emotional conversations when eating
- Create a calm eating environment
- Remind yourself, “I am choosing to eat this.”



# Increase social support

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Social support decreases stress, loneliness and isolation. And it provides an outlet for belonging and sharing feelings. Consider:

- Informal groups
- Family support
- Gyms or sports groups
- Formal supports such as meetings
- Counseling
- Medical support





**A case study**

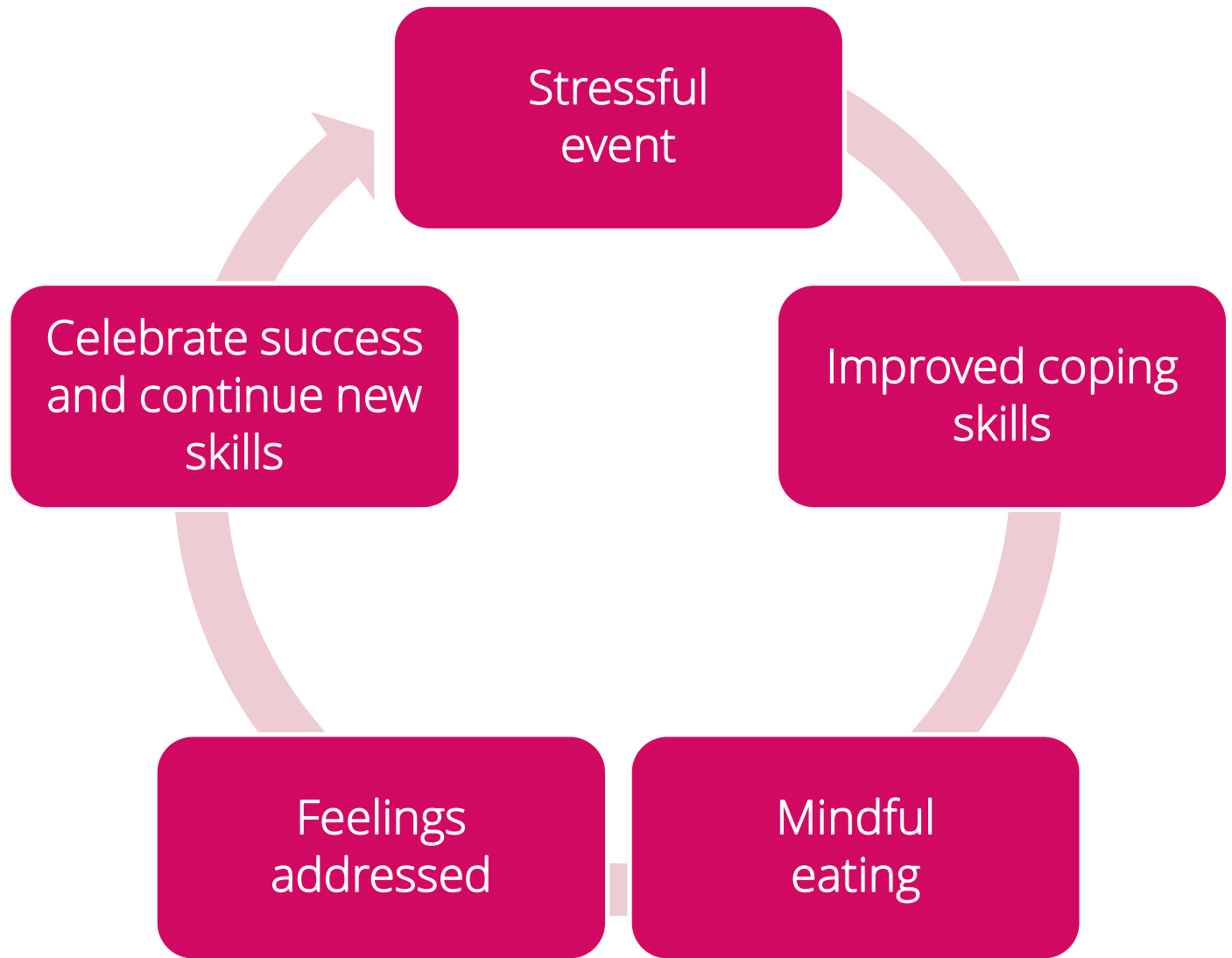
**“If I eat when I’m upset, I’ll only end up with two problems: the problem that made me upset in the first place and now the additional problem of feeling bad about myself and my eating. Ask myself: Do I want to have one problem or two problems?”**

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Judith S. Beck, PhD



**Breaking  
away:  
A healthy  
cycle**



# Thank you for attending!

All calls are confidential, except as required by law.

Information is believed to be accurate as of the production date;  
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