

# SIMPLE STEPS TO OVERCOME EMOTIONAL EATING





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# Simple Steps To Overcome Emotional Eating



By Dr. Sarah Allen

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# **Simple Steps To Overcome Emotional Eating**

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## Simple Steps To Overcome Emotional Eating

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Hi There,

Thank you for downloading my free booklet. If you have got this far you are probably struggling to have a healthy relationship with food. Men and women of all ages, shapes and sizes can experience emotional eating. This term is used when your eating habits are affected by your emotions in some way, usually with negative consequences such as weight gain or feelings of shame and guilt.

### Let's Identify the Problem

Have you ever found yourself standing in front of the fridge searching for something to eat, even though you are not hungry? Or do you want crunchy snack food when you feel angry, but not hungry. Do you get cravings for certain foods (usually unhealthy ones, as let's face it, most people don't crave a salad!), struggle not to eat them and then feel guilty afterwards?

If you are answering yes to any of those you may have lost the ability to listen to your appetite and nourish your body with healthy ways of eating. I'm not saying that you should never eat sweets or snack food, but we



are not really talking here about the need to eat a balanced diet. We are talking about restricting foods, then bingeing and having obsessional thoughts surrounding food, body shape and weight. We are talking about turning to food, consciously or subconsciously, when we really need nurture or love. We are talking about behaviors that are usually followed by feelings of regret, guilt and shame. Sound familiar? The next few pages have some things you can do to change your relationship with food.



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### Step 1. Find Out If You Are an Emotional Eater & What Type

The first step is to identify whether you are an emotional eater and if yes, let's work out what emotions tend to trigger you.

Questions	yes	no
Do you ever eat without realizing you're even doing it?		
Do you ever feel guilty or ashamed after eating?		
Do you often eat alone or at odd locations, such as sitting in your car so people don't see you eating?		
Do you eat after an experience that has caused a negative emotion, such as being angry after an argument even if you aren't feeling hungry?		
Do you crave specific foods when you're upset, such as always wanting chocolate when you're feeling depressed?		
Do you feel the urge to eat in when you experience external cues like seeing food advertised on television?		
Do you eat because you feel there's nothing else to do?		
Does eating improve your mood when you're sad?		
Does eating distract you from your problems when you're worried about something?		

You are an emotional eater if you answered yes to any of the questions above. I am guessing you are not surprised at that result because you were interested enough in emotional eating to download this guide, but please now complete the questionnaire on the next page to see which emotions you are typically using food to numb.



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### What Type Of Emotional Eater Am I?

	Check All The Statements That Are True For You	Yes
1	When I feel down or depressed I eat to lift my mood	
2	I feel a greater urge to eat when I am depressed or feeling low	
3	I tend to eat more when I am disappointed	
4	I tend to overeat when I feel stressed	
5	I reach for snacks when I am under pressure or overwhelmed	
6	If I am nervous or worried I eat	
7	When people irritate or frustrate me I eat to calm myself	
8	I am compelled to eat to get back at someone who has made me angry	
9	I reach for food to make me feel better when I am angry	
10	When I am bored I tend to eat more than I usually do	
11	I start looking forward to a snack when time is passing slowly	
12	I reach for a snack when I have nothing to do	
13	My appetite increases when I am alone	
14	Eating makes me feel less lonely when I am alone	
15	When I am with others I am less likely to overeat than when I am alone	
16	I celebrate with food that I generally don't allow myself	
17	I don't worry about dieting or restricting certain foods when I am happy	
18	When I am happy, eating certain foods makes me feel even happier	



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The questionnaire statements above relate to common types of emotional eating. By reviewing the statements you answered yes to should give you a general idea of your particular trigger(s) for emotional eating.

- 1 – 3: Depressed Eating
- 4 – 6: Anxiety/ Stress Eating
- 7 – 9: Anger Driven Eating
- 10 – 12: Boredom Eating
- 13 – 15: Loneliness Eating
- 16 – 18: Happy Eating

**My Triggers Are**



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### Step 2. What Is The Difference Between Bingeing, Binge Eating Disorder and Bulimia?

All these types of eating disorders involve bingeing which as I said earlier, involves a person consuming very large quantities of food over a short period of time, usually when they are not physically hungry.

Binges are often planned and can involve the person buying "special binge foods". Afterwards binge eaters usually feel guilt or disgust.

Binge eating is the most serious type of emotional eating and is the main characteristic of bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder, two serious eating disorders (see side bar).

There are other more common types of emotional eating though. Many people eat when they aren't hungry and in response to emotions but they may not lose control and binge. Unnecessary snacking or grazing, as well as binging can be triggered by emotions. Even though not classified as a psychiatric disorder, these less serious types of emotional eating can still lead to weight gain and/or negative feelings about oneself.

#### Binge Eating Disorder (BED)

The DSM V criteria states that BED includes frequent overeating—at least once a week for three months—combined with lack of control, marked feelings of distress, and are associated with three or more of the following:

- eating much more rapidly than normal
- eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
- eating alone because of feeling embarrassed by how much one is eating
- feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty afterward

**Binge eating disorder** is the most common eating disorder in the United States affecting 3.5% of females and 2% of males and is prevalent in up to 30% of those seeking weight loss treatment.

**Bulimia nervosa** is an eating disorder also characterized by binge eating (or consuming a large amount of food in a short amount of time), but also includes purging (an attempt to rid oneself of the food consumed typically by vomiting, taking a laxative or diuretic, and/or excessive exercise) because of an extensive concern for body weight. To be classified a psychiatric disorder, it must happen at least once a week for at least three months. Approximately 1% of adults have bulimia, 95% of which are female.



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### Step 3. Learn the Difference Between Emotional Hunger & Physical Hunger

Before you can break free of emotional eating you have to learn how to tell the difference between your emotional and physical hunger. This can be really difficult if you regularly use food to deal with your emotions.



Next time you think about food ask use the table below to identify the type of hunger you are having.

Emotional Vs Physical Hunger	
Emotional hunger urges you to satisfy it instantly.	Physical hunger can wait.
Emotional hunger comes on suddenly.	Physical hunger comes on gradually.
Emotional hunger craves specific options that you consider comfort foods.	Physical hunger is open to a wide range of options – lots of things sound good.
Emotional hunger isn't satisfied, even when your stomach is full.	Physical hunger stops when you're full.
Emotional eating triggers feelings of guilt, powerlessness and shame.	Eating to satisfy physical hunger doesn't make you feel bad about yourself.



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### Step 4. Identify Your Emotions Before You Eat

So we have identified that you are an emotional eater and that there are certain feelings that make you more likely to eat. As mentioned earlier, emotional eating tends to be automatic and virtually mindless. Before you even realize what you're doing, you've reached for the bag of chips and polished off half of it. As you open your refrigerator or your kitchen cabinets reaching for food, learn to stop and check in with yourself. That way you give yourself the opportunity to make a different decision.

All you have to do is put off eating for five minutes or if five minutes seems unmanageable, start with one minute. Ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Am I hungry?**
- 2. Do I really need more food in my stomach?**
- 3. If I am not hungry, which one of my triggers is pushing me to want food?**
- 4. What are my feelings now I have recognized this?**

Keep a small journal by the refrigerator. Write these questions and the answers every time you find yourself in this type of situation. While you write your thoughts you will not be thinking about food as our brains cannot hold two simultaneous thoughts. Note in your journal if



you are lonely, bored, stressed or depressed. Write any events, a phone call, a cancelled plan, it is raining, anything that you can think of that may have caused your craving or trip to the food area. You may be surprised at how trivial the trigger can be, but make a note of it anyway. At least you will know what is triggering your behavior and hopefully it will help you understand that food is only one choice you can make.



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### Step 5. Alternatives to Emotional Eating

It can really help to make a list of things of all the things you can do that distracting you from eating emotionally and keep it somewhere handy, posted on the fridge, in your purse, etc.

- ❖ **If you're depressed or lonely**, call someone who always makes you feel better, play with your dog or cat or look at a favorite photo or cherished memento.
- ❖ **If you're anxious**, use your nervous energy by dancing to your favorite song, squeezing a stress ball or taking a brisk walk.
- ❖ **If you're exhausted**, treat yourself with a hot cup of tea, take a bath, light some scented candles or wrap yourself in a warm blanket and let yourself relax.
- ❖ **If you're bored**, read a good book, watch a comedy show, leave the house and run an errand or visit somewhere you have enjoyed going before. Alternatively, turn to an activity you know you enjoy (playing the guitar, shooting hoops, scrapbooking, etc.)

I know you feel powerless over your food cravings at the moment. When the urge to eat hits, it's all you can think about. You may feel an almost unbearable tension that demands to be fed, right now! Just because you've tried to resist in the past and failed, that doesn't mean that you have no willpower. Take it one craving at a time and purposely look to all your successes not just when you failed to resist.

**You have more power over your cravings than you think!**



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### Step 6. Learn To Accept Your Feelings—Even the Bad Ones

While it may seem that your problem is that you're powerless over food, emotional eating actually comes from feeling powerless over emotions. If you deal with feelings by numbing or soothing yourself with food, you stop feeling capable of dealing with your feelings head.

Allowing yourself to feel uncomfortable emotions can be scary. You may fear that, like Pandora's box, once you open the door you won't be able to shut it. But the truth is that when we don't obsess over or suppress our emotions, even the most painful and difficult feelings subside relatively quickly and lose their power to control our attention. To do this you need to become aware and learn how to stay connected to your emotional.



This can enable you to rein in stress and repair emotional problems that often trigger emotional eating. Emotional eating often goes hand in hand with mood disorders such as depression and anxiety which may need the help of a trained psychotherapist to support you while you are trying to overcome your

**There are a multitude of research studies that have shown that Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is the most effective way of treating disordered eating and body image.**



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### Step 7. How Does Counseling For Emotional Eating Work?

Counseling that uses CBT works by identifying your emotional triggers to overeating (we have already started doing this here in the booklet) as well as any other causes that have not been properly identified or addressed before such as co-occurrence of mood disorders, perfectionism, relationship difficulties and self-esteem.



Next we look at the thoughts you have that are not helpful to you and trigger feelings of distress and of things being out of your control. We can then develop your own personal toolkit of coping strategies so that you begin responding to negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, anger and sadness in a healthy way without guilt and shame.

Using CBT can also help you gain confidence in your ability to make healthy choices in a reasonable way without being overly harsh on yourself. It can also change how you think and feel about food, eating and body image. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy can also increase your self-confidence in your body and shape and learn how to avoid the thoughts that lead to bingeing, purging or feelings of hopelessness.





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Thank you for taking the time to read my booklet. I hope it has been helpful and will go on to be a source of useful information for you. Remember though that you can't change everything at once and if you try some of the strategies I talked about and you still ended up overeating, please be kind to yourself. Don't beat yourself up, just try again the next time a craving comes. More information about eating disorders can be found on my website [www.drSarahallen.com](http://www.drSarahallen.com). If you are experiencing an unhealthy relationship with food that gets in the way of enjoying your life, please remember you are not alone and support is available and will help.

### About The Author



Dr. Sarah Allen is originally from the UK but has been living and bringing up her family in Northbrook, IL for the past 16 years.

She received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Southampton University, England, where she trained in a psychotherapy treatment called cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). CBT is short-term "here and now" therapy that is a proven effective treatment for a wide range of problems including depression, anxiety, stress, eating /weight issues and relationship problems.

Her skills and 20 years of experience allow her to get to the root of problems quickly and show you practical ways to feel more in control of your life.

There are many ways we hold ourselves back from happiness. Sarah empowers her clients with the tools necessary to deal with the stress that life and relationships bring, both in the present and for when they show up again in the future.

For more information about Dr. Allen's services please visit her website at [www.drSarahallen.com](http://www.drSarahallen.com) or contact her for to discuss whether you could benefit from working with her on 847 791-7722 or email [drsfcallen@gmail.com](mailto:drsfcallen@gmail.com).

You can also sign up for her blog on [www.drSarahallen.com](http://www.drSarahallen.com) to read more tips on how to deal with emotions without soothing yourself with food.