

Bandage My Heart with Chocolate: Unwrapping Emotional Eating



One pound anatomically correct chocolate human heart
(www.pushindaisies.com)

Presented by
Lisa Currie, M.S.Ed.
Wesleyan University

Goals

- Define emotional eating
- Identify contributing factors to the development of emotional eating patterns
- Examine potential triggers for eating episodes
- Consider strategies for reducing or overcoming emotional eating



Eating Continuum



From www.aveighout.com



Defining Emotional Eating

- ❑ Eating to manage mood; to soothe or satisfy an unidentified or unnamed emotional need rather than fuel the body.
- ❑ Eating to satisfy mind or mouth hunger, not actual stomach hunger.
- ❑ Connected to food thoughts.



Food Thoughts

- ❑ A food thought is used in reaction to... and as a defense against a stressful life situation and used to manage mood.
- ❑ Food thoughts helps one successfully "disconnect" from their feelings since it puts the focus on food, not on the feeling.
- ❑ Upset may not *cause* food thoughts; upset may be *prevented* by food thoughts.



The Eight Traits of Emotional Hunger

Physical Hunger

1. Is gradual.
2. Is open to different foods.
3. Is based in the stomach.
4. Is patient.
5. Occurs out of physical need.
6. Involves deliberate choices and awareness of the eating.
7. Stops eating when full.
8. Realizes eating is necessary.

Emotional Hunger

1. Is sudden.
2. Is for a specific food.
3. Is "above the neck."
4. Is urgent.
5. Is paired with an upsetting emotion.
6. Involves automatic or absent-minded eating.
7. Does not notice or stop eating, in response to fullness.
8. Feels guilty about eating.



So...it's not about food!

- “The drive to eat (compulsively) is not about food. It is about hungers. The hungers of regret and sorrow, of unspoken anger, unrealized dreams; the hungers of your own potential that are waiting to be filled, like a baby bird’s mouth...Something in you – the voice of your hungers – does not want to die without having realized your own uniqueness, so it calls to you.”

- Excerpted from “Feeding the Hungry Heart: The Experience of Emotional Eating” by Geneen Roth



What the medical experts are saying...

“Weight-loss help: How to stop emotional eating”

- Learn to recognize true hunger.
 - Know your triggers.
 - Look elsewhere for comfort.
 - Don't keep unhealthy foods around.
 - Snack healthy.
 - Eat a balanced diet.
 - Exercise regularly and get adequate rest.
-
- Mayo Clinic, “Weight-loss help: How to stop emotional eating”
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/weight-loss/MH00025>



Emotions most often associated with Emotional Eating

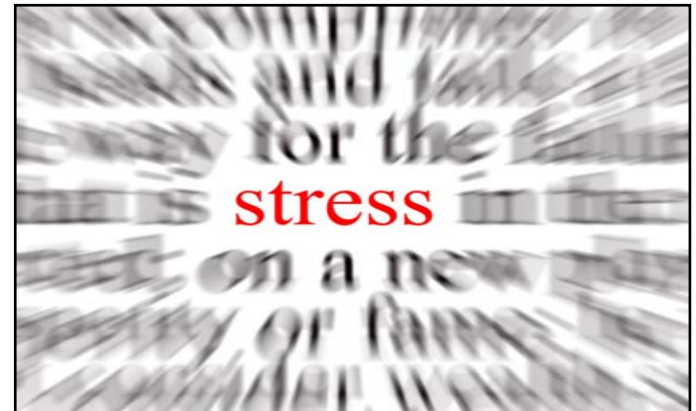
- Guilt
- Shame
- Helplessness
- Anxiety
- Disappointment
- Confusion
- Loneliness

- “The Food & Feelings Workbook”, by Karen Koenig



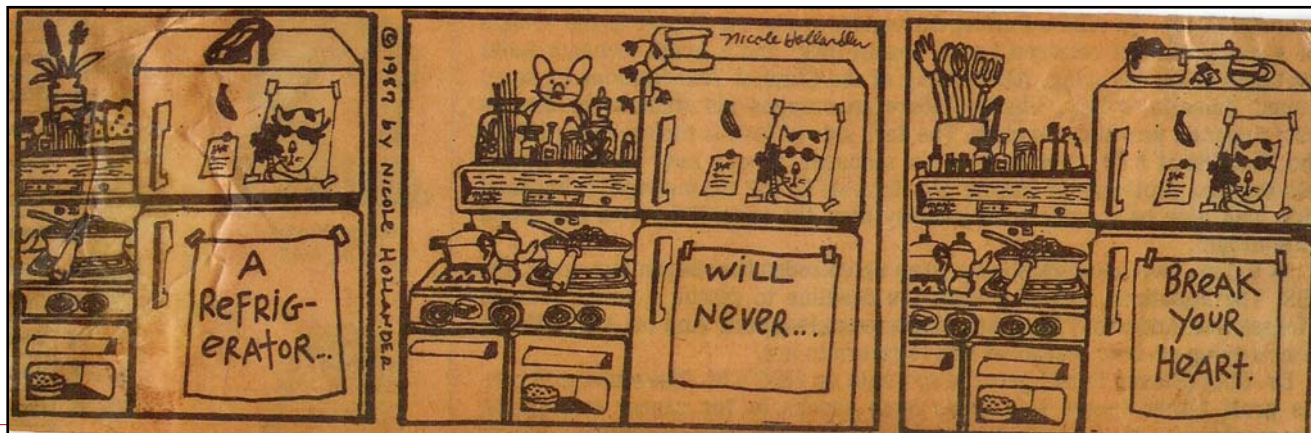
Stress-linked Eating Response

- Cortisol cravings
- Social eating
- Nervous energy
- Childhood habits
- Stuffing emotions



Cultural Influences

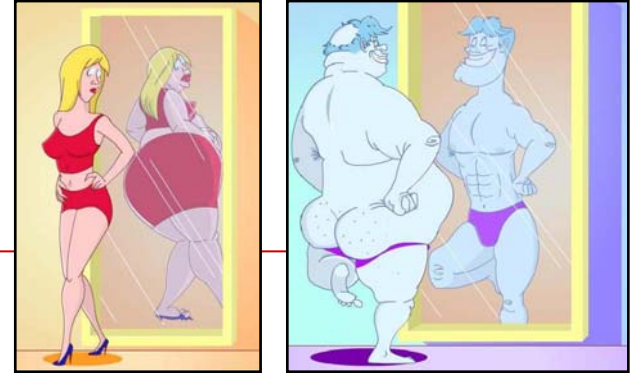
- ❑ Surface over Substance:
More important to look good than to feel good
- ❑ ...and feeling bad is not an option
- ❑ “Inner work” not seen as “doing anything”



Media Influences



The Thin Commandments



1. If you aren't thin you aren't attractive.
2. Being thin is more important than being healthy.
3. You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner.
4. Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty.
5. Thou shall not eat fattening food without punishing oneself afterwards.
6. Thou shall count calories and restrict intake accordingly.
7. What the scale says is the most important thing.
8. Losing weight is good/gaining weight is bad.
9. You can never be too thin.
10. Being thin and not eating are signs of true will power and success.

by Carolyn Costin M.A., M.Ed., MFT, Clinical Director of the Eating Disorder Center of California

http://www.edreferral.com/thin_commandments.htm



Marketing Influences



Family/Interpersonal Influences

- ❑ Cultural relationship with food
- ❑ Scarcity of food for earlier generations (immigrants, Great Depression, World Wars, etc.)
- ❑ Family traditions surrounding food
- ❑ Difficulty understanding and expressing emotions

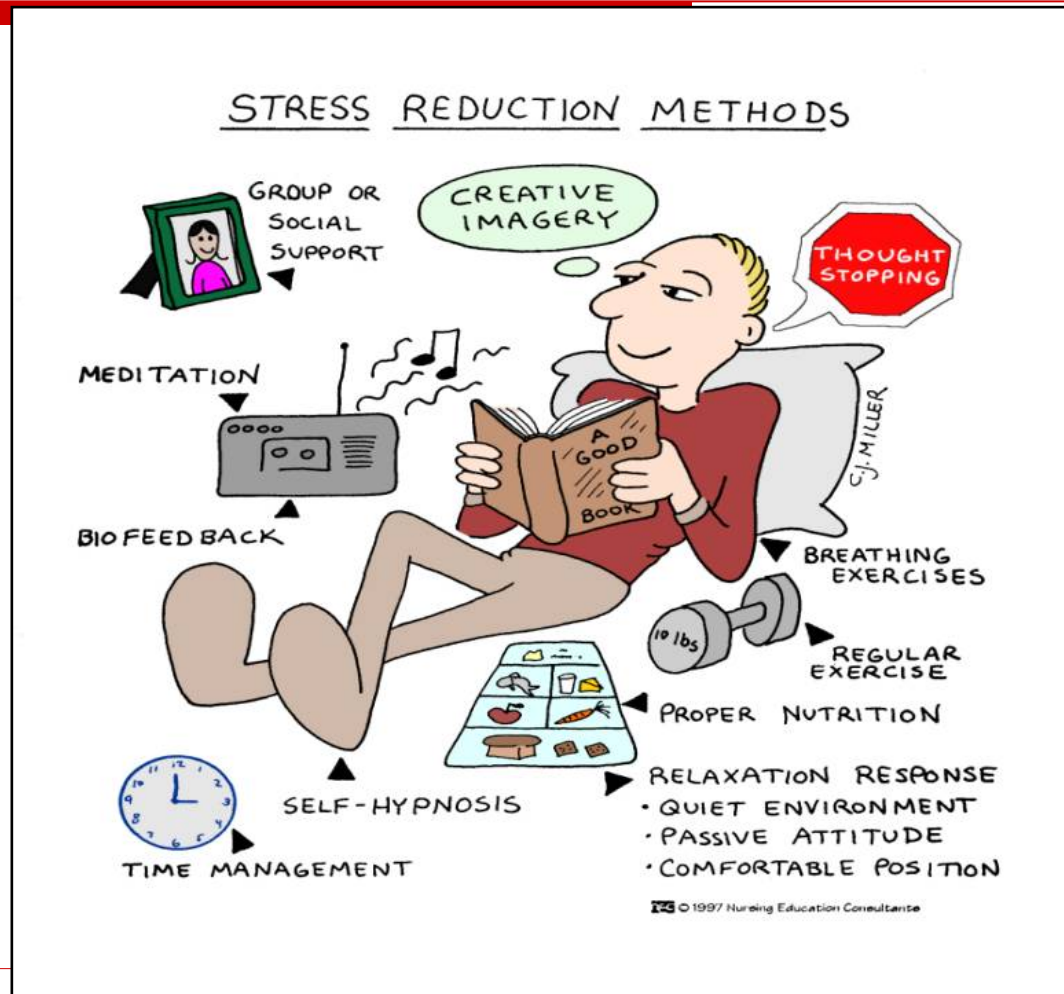


Individual Influences

- Lack of more effective coping skills
- Biochemistry
- Dieting



Reducing emotional eating response



Identifying Triggers



- Use the Emotional Eating Quiz
- Ask honest questions, give honest answers
- Write it down
 - “Curiosity Dialogue”
 - Food/emotion journal or diary



Strategies To Reduce Emotional Eating

- Understand, own and express emotions and the factors that drive emotional eating behaviors
 - The best way to deal with an emotion is to feel it!
 - Express it somehow!
 - Encourage counseling/therapy



Understand Mindful or Intuitive Eating

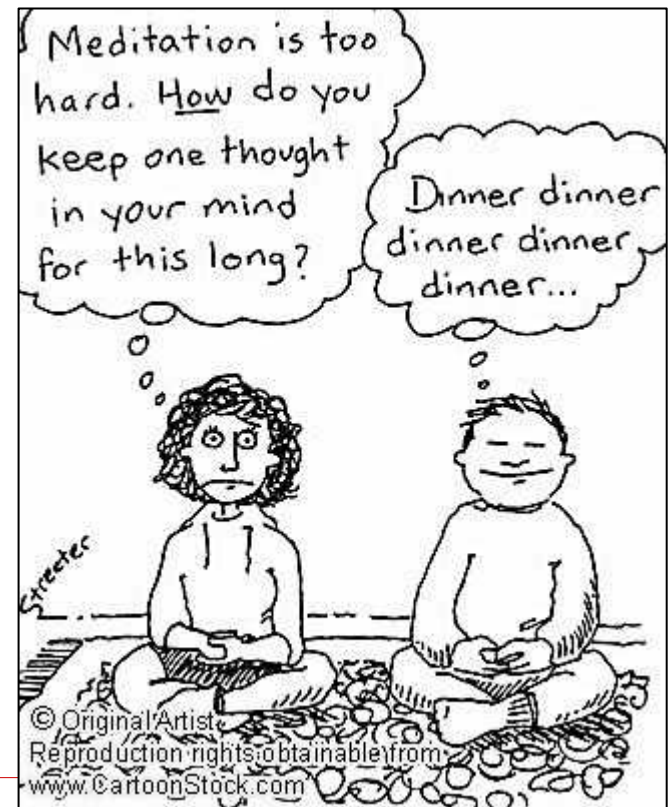
- Not judging food as good or bad
- Eating when your stomach is hungry
- Stopping when your stomach is full
- Flexible to your body's needs
 - Over eating at times, under eating at other times
 - Leaving food on your plate or going back for more
 - Varies with the rhythms of your body & life



Strategies To Reduce Emotional Eating

□ Practice Mindful Eating habits

- Stop Dieting!!!
- *Dine*, don't just eat
- Listen to your body
- Avoid eating by the clock
- Partner with a friend!
- Ask yourself the Hunger Questions
- Use the Hunger/Satiety Scale



Strategies To Reduce Emotional Eating

□ Stress Reduction Technique

- Stop
- Breathe
- Reflect
- Choose



□ *The Wellness Book* by Herbert Benson, M.D. and Eileen M. Stuart, R.N., C., M.S.





Hunger Questions

- Why do I want to eat right now?

- Am I physically hungry?

- What am I hungry for?

- Is my hunger satisfied?



Hunger/Satiety Scale



- 0 = Starving and beyond.
- 1 = You are so hungry you may order everything on the menu.
- 2 = Very preoccupied with your hunger.
-
- 3 = You are hungry, and the urge to eat is strong.
- 4 = A little hungry; can wait to eat, but will be hungrier soon.
- 5 = Neutral. Not hungry, not full.
- 6 = No longer hungry, but could eat more.
- 7 = Hunger is definitely gone. Best place to stop eating.
-
- 8 = Not uncomfortable, definite belly full.
- 9 = Moving into uncomfortable.
- 10 = "Thanksgiving full."



But when have I had enough?



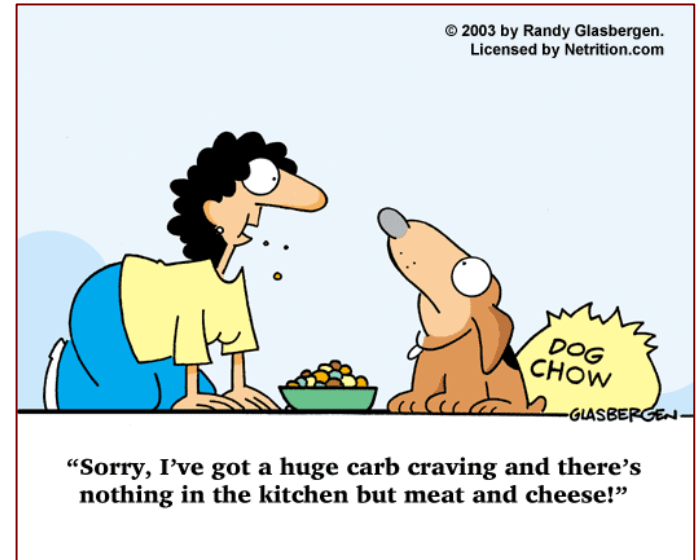
- Being full and having enough are not necessarily the same thing
- You can never get enough of what you don't really want
- To be satisfied, both your mind and body have to be engaged

- Excerpted from "Satisfying Mind Hunger"
by Geneen Roth, Prevention.com



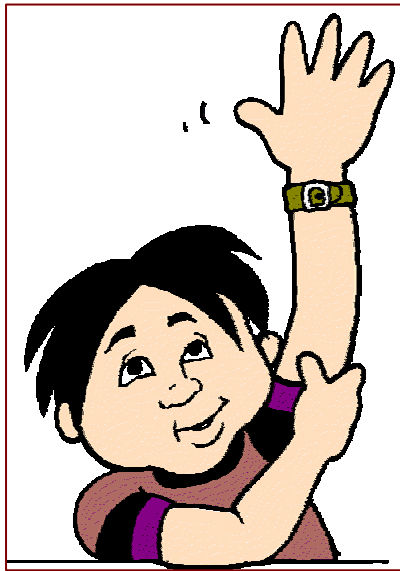
Strategies To Reduce Emotional Eating

- Listen to your cravings and food/body thoughts
 - What does the food you are craving represent?
 - What is it saying you need, if it something other than food?
 - What do your food/body thoughts usually revolve around?



Addressing Emotional Eating

Discussion: What can we do to address emotional eating?



Contact me at...

Lisa Currie, M.S.Ed.

- Director of Health Education
Wesleyan University
lcurrie@wesleyan.edu
www.wesleyan.edu/weswell
860.685.2466
- Educational Speaker
www.outofthefridge.com

