



## The Description

Emotional eating is characterized by episodes of binge-eating, grazing and/or eating when not hungry to soothe feelings.

Binge-eating is characterized by uncontrollable eating followed by guilt and feelings of shame about the behavior. Dieting is mistakenly seen as the solution and is undertaken with strenuous effort.

Feelings of deprivation result from rigid dieting. These feelings are assuaged by eating foods that produce more guilt, ultimately leading to defeat of the diet and demoralization. The problem becomes cyclic because diets address symptoms rather than issues.

Emotional eaters have a pattern of eating to cope with stress, emotional conflicts and problems of daily life. Whether overeating or dieting, the emotional eater is still engaged in an unremitting problem with food.

An emotional eater may or may not be obese. Obesity is defined as weighing more than 25% above expected normal body weight. Not all overweight people are emotional eaters.



## Recognizing Emotional Eating\*

- Obsessive thoughts about food.
- Episodic binge-eating with awareness that the pattern is abnormal.
- Fear of not being able to stop voluntarily
- Feeling out of control.
- Self-deprecating thoughts follow binges
- Depressed mood.
- Eating little in public.
- Hiding evidence of having eaten.
- Cycling through dieting, bingeing, remorse.
- Specific foods labeled "good" or "bad".
- Disconnection from signals of hunger/satiety.
- Weight frequently fluctuates.
- Preoccupation with body image.
- Restricting activities due to embarrassment about weight and/or eating habits.
- Difficulty identifying feelings and needs.
- Intense fear of anger and conflict.
- Impulsivity in other areas of life.
- Food is used for reward, nurturing and excitement.

## Associated Issues\*

- Low self-esteem. Self-esteem based on weight and control of eating.
- Fantasizing about being happier, more outgoing when thin.
- Intense fear of rejection related to weight.
- Social withdrawal and isolation increases.
- Putting off taking risks in life until thin.
- Feeling tormented by eating habits.
- Professional failures attributed to weight.
- Weight becomes the focus of life.



## Medical Consequences\*

- Hypertension
- Depression/Fatigue
- Gastrointestinal disorders
- Diabetes/Hypoglycemia
- High cholesterol
- Heart disease
- Gallbladder disease
- Mobility problems
- Hormonal imbalances
- Fertility problems
- Certain types of cancer
- Sleep apnea and sleep disorders

## Our Story

Many of us began eating secretly during our youth. We ate when we were not physically hungry in an attempt to manage feelings of despair, fear, sadness, and loneliness. As time went by, our eating behaviors worsened. We binged, we hid while eating, and some of us resorted to stealing food. Once a binge commenced, we were unable to stop. We had lost control. To manage our body weight, we dieted and berated ourselves. As our lives increasingly focused on food and weight, we became depressed, isolated and our self-esteem plummeted. We felt unworthy, unlovable, and rejected. We needed help. Diets didn't work.

*\* These rarely all apply to any one person.*







### Could this be you?

Typically graced with intelligence and talent, many of us became so engaged with our eating disorder that we bypassed opportunities to take the necessary steps required to fulfill our dreams and succeed in life. Sometimes, our potential went unrealized as we became progressively more preoccupied with food. We suppressed feelings and denied needs. We lost touch with our authentic self, and found ourselves unable to recognize and identify our emotions. Depression often set in; we became, at times, more isolated and felt hopeless. Eating was a way to squelch our shame and disappointments in life. We used food in an unsuccessful attempt to meet deep emotional needs. We discovered that we could not stop until we found - and practiced - more satisfying ways to meet our emotional needs.

### Recovery

1. Starts with willingness to be honest.
2. Typically requires professional help and group support.
3. Requires facing and dealing with emotions openly and responsibly.

There is no diet or magic pill that will make us better. Recovery is hard work. Emotional eating is not about food; it is a coping tool for handling life. Many of us were deeply negative and unable to distinguish negative thought patterns from reality; our perspective was distorted. Most of us were caretakers who were out of touch with our own needs.



Because our needs went unmet, we were deeply resentful. In recovery, we learn to recognize our needs and take responsibility for getting them met. This raises our self-esteem!

### More on Recovery


*Recovery means rebuilding trust with ourselves.*

We listen to ourselves, validate our feelings, try to understand our needs and get them met. We learn to express ourselves with dignity. We accept how we feel, and if we don't like what we feel, we change what we are doing or we change what we think. Changing our thinking makes it possible to change our feelings and behavior; developing willingness and learning new skills is a process, not an event. It takes time to develop an eating disorder. It takes time and effort to rebuild trust and gain back the power of choice.

Most of us wasted a lot of time trying to recover by ourselves. Recovery requires such support and motivation. There are bound to be setbacks and moments of fear and frustration; support helps us get through these trials safely.

Support groups provide necessary examples, inspiration, and opportunity for turning deeply painful and humbling experiences to useful purpose. EDA is one such support group. As we learned to be more honest with ourselves and open with others, we regained our authenticity, perspective, and empowerment. We also made real friends. In time, we found that taking responsibility for getting our needs met felt terrific!

The truth -- our own truth -- does set us free. It works for us. It will work for you, too!



eating disorders  
*anonymous*

*Talks about*

**Emotional  
Eating**