

Healthy Habits

from Prime of Life Fitness

What's Eating You?

Maintaining a healthy weight should be an easy proposition: Identify the number of calories you need to sustain your ideal weight, and eat that much.

But it's never that easy, is it? Because our rational brain doesn't make most of our food decisions. Many of our food decisions come from deep inside our primal, emotional, animal brain, and logic never gets a chance to play.

Because food is essential for survival, many of our feeding impulses are driven from that basic animal brain, and emotion--even more than hunger--becomes a huge driver for our actions.

Between our evolutionary history as hunter gatherers and our cultural upbringing in a world of abundant food choices, we are set up to use food to cope with any number of non-hunger related emotions.

Think about your own life. Do you use food in any of these situations:

- When you're feeling stressed or anxious?
- When you're grieving or sad?
- When you're feeling depressed?
- When you're bored?
- When you're feeling lonely or unloved?
- When you feel you deserve a reward?
- When you're celebrating a special occasion?
- When you want to socialize with friends?
- When you're angry or hurt?
- When you're seeking pleasure and enjoyment?



If you're like most people, you can think of times that you've used food to manage each of those situations, and you can probably name one or two on that list that are regular occurrences, where food has become your go-to coping mechanism. And did you notice that physical hunger has nothing to do with any of them?

To keep these emotionally-charged circumstances from derailing healthy eating plans, you'll need a two-pronged approach. First, awareness. Before you eat, ask yourself why

you're eating. Is it because you're hungry? Or are you facing one of the situations we just outlined?

Knowledge is power, and sometimes just being aware of why you're eating can help you make a different choice.

Second, arm yourself with alternative coping mechanisms, and try those alternatives before you eat. If you're angry or hurt, an honest conversation with the person who hurt you may be all you need to resolve the issue. If you're stressed, a walk around the block, a funny video, or a game of fetch with your dog might be a good alternative to chocolate cake. If you want to socialize with friends, a game of cards can be just as much fun as a shared pizza.

Action Item: Think about your own emotional eating triggers, and for each one write down 2-3 alternative actions you can take before you reach for that pint of Ben & Jerry's. Have your alternatives ready, like tools in your toolbox, to use the next time an emotional or social trigger prompts you to eat when you're really not hungry.

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