

# How to stop being an emotional eater

*Eating is about much more than satisfying physical hunger. Many of us turn to food to celebrate milestones, as well as during times of stress, sadness or frustration. But what impact does emotional eating have on your health?*

By **Rea Makhokolo** September 25, 2018



Emotional eating is a learnt way of coping with negative emotions. To stop eating when you're upset, you need to find other ways of dealing with the situation. Business and life coach Penny Holburn offers the following tips:

## ***Learn to understand hunger***

Whenever you're tempted to eat, ask yourself whether you're craving food because you're physically hungry or seeking comfort. By understanding the origin of your hunger, you can start to see food as a way of fuelling your body, rather than a form of emotional support.

## ***Keep a food diary***

Write down what, when and why you eat. This will help you identify your triggers and avoid them in the future. If you're in an uncomfortable situation, be mindful of how you respond.

## ***Deal with your emotions***

Start analysing the feelings that make you want to raid the fridge. Then look for other ways of dealing with them, such as talking about them to someone or writing in a journal.

## ***Practise good eating habits***

When you feel hungry, drink water and wait 10 minutes before you eat, because food cravings can pass quickly. Plan what you're going to eat and try to have small meals throughout the day, as this will lessen the desire to binge.

## ***Compromise***

It's important to enjoy meal times, so don't deprive yourself of the things you love – just learn to make wiser choices. For example, if you're craving something sweet, opt for a piece of fruit or a small block of dark chocolate. If you're after something salty, try vegetable sticks with hummus or guacamole.

## ***Distract yourself***

Find a non-eating, pleasurable activity to do when you're feeling down – go for a walk, phone a friend, listen to music or have a bath. Learn from setbacks. We all have bad days. If you do have an episode of emotional eating, don't beat yourself up over it – and don't compound the problem by eating even more (“I've already had a packet of crisps, so I may as well have a cheeseburger too”). Just try to learn from the experience by analysing what triggered it. Then start afresh.

– *Nazley Omar*