

# EMOTIONAL



# EATING 101

*Provided by...*

## Shrink Yourself

Effective Emotional Eating Treatment

# Introduction

Welcome to Emotional Eating 101, an eBook designed to help you learn more about food addiction (overeating, binge eating, compulsive eating) and how it affects your life.

My name is Dr. Roger Gould, and I have been helping people break the bonds of emotional eating for over 20 years in my psychiatric practice, with my book, [Shrink Yourself](#), and with the program on my website, [Shrink Yourself.com](#). I have assembled this eBook from those three sources in hopes that it will help you break the emotional eating habit once and for all.

## **In this eBook we will cover:**

- Emotional Eating
- Emotional Hunger
- Food Addiction
- Patterns of Addiction
- 12 Types of Emotional Hunger
- The Failure “Strategies”
- How to Beat Emotional Eating
- And Much More

Emotional eating and food addiction are the major reasons why diets fail and people can't lose weight (or keep it off). The first step to overcoming the hurdle of emotional eating and food addiction is education, which is what you will receive with this eBook.

This will help you on your weight loss journey because you'll have the insights you need to stop looking at food as a way to deal with your emotions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Roger Gould". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Roger Gould

# Chapter 1

## Emotional Eating

If you are like most people, you are keenly aware that diet programs don't work for long. It's safe to say that no new diet or exercise regimen--no matter how biologically sound it may be--is likely to result in lifelong weight loss. But why is that? It's because you can't control what you eat.

The bottom line is that you already know how to lose weight. You know that if you eat less and exercise more eventually you'll see the pounds come off. But if you know that eating less and exercising more will result in weight loss, why don't you just do it? What's getting in your way? Or, if you do succeed in losing a little weight with a diet, why do you usually regain the weight you lost? Why can't you hold onto healthier habits as a way of life? Why do you overeat despite your best intentions?

The answer to all these questions is the same: emotional eating. Most simply defined, emotional eating means you eat to satisfy emotional hunger; it means you use food for comfort or as a way to cope with life; and it means you eat for reasons other than what your body needs.

Take any moment in time, focus the camera lens on your neighborhood, take a close look, and you'll find emotional eating. You'll find dozens of people--maybe even hundreds or thousands--breaking their diets at this very second. All those people woke up this morning determined to stay away from fattening treats or eat reasonable portions, but by afternoon, many had one hand on the Twix Bar and the other on the forehead, wondering why, why on earth they had no willpower. In fact, you are probably one of those people. Maybe boredom at work has propelled you to the snack table, or a snub from a friend or an ugly new assignment. Whenever you reach for a boredom-breaking snack despite your commitment, or whenever you eat to quell anxiety, that's emotional eating. Whenever you binge after a fight, or double up on portions because your day turned sour, that's emotional eating. Whenever you feel that sharp craving for your favorite food, that's emotional eating.

When it comes to emotional eating, people aren't eating to feed their body. No one needs a candy bar after a fight to make it through the night. When people eat at times like these, they are eating to satisfy, numb, or avoid their emotions. And unfortunately, it's all too common.

People who are suffering from emotional eating are driven to eat so they won't have to face what's bothering them internally. And in many ways, they become addicted to this way of handling life. They feel compelled to eat in this way and can't control what they eat. That's why diets don't work. If you're struggling with emotional eating and can't choose to eat less and exercise more, you can't lose weight. It's that simple. And since no diet ever teaches you how to control what you eat, they are doomed to fail sooner or later. In other words, unless you can learn to stop emotional eating, you will never be able to lose weight and keep it off. Period.

## **Emotional Hunger**

Emotional hunger is what fuels emotional eating. Unfortunately, you will always have emotional hunger no matter what you do. That's part of being human. However, emotional hunger is not so much the problem as how you deal with it.

People who suffer from emotional eating usually only deal with emotional hunger by eating. And, since life is rife with emotional turmoil, emotional eaters are normally overweight. They are so attached to dealing with the ups and downs of life with food that any suggestion that they can stop emotional eating makes them nervous. Many people cannot imagine being able to handle a bad day without turning to food for comfort. In this way, the tendency to handle emotional hunger with food is no different than a smoker's tendency to handle stress with a cigarette.

When you are an emotional eater, the odd thing about emotional hunger is that you feel truly hungry, and at the moment when the craving for food grips you, you can't tell that your hunger originates in your mind, not in your belly. People who are not emotional eaters, who never really satisfied emotional hunger with food, usually eat less when they are troubled by emotional hunger. Their emotional hunger doesn't feel like physical hunger, just as a non-smoker's stress doesn't give them the urge to smoke.

I like to think of it this way: emotional eaters eat when they aren't really hungry because they have two stomachs--one real, the other a phantom. The hunger in your belly signals you when your system has a biological requirement for food. If that was the only signal of hunger you received, you'd be thin. It's the phantom stomach that causes the problems. The phantom stomach sends out a hunger signal when unruly emotions and unsolved personal agendas start pushing themselves into awareness. A short-circuit occurs, and you feel so hungry that you're compelled to eat.

I see the power of the phantom stomach demonstrated almost daily in my work with patients. The other day, a patient who had just finished breakfast told me in the middle of a difficult session that she suddenly felt extremely hungry. As soon as we started talking about her sexual problems with her husband, her appetite kicked in and she could hardly wait to get to McDonald's. Her phantom stomach was shouting, demanding action.

Phantom hunger has such power that it drives you to go to almost any lengths to satisfy it. I saw this fact demonstrated in Technicolor when I consulted at the Pritikin Institute in Santa Monica, California, where clients paid ten thousand dollars a month to take part in a controlled diet and exercise program. Although the tuition for the program far exceeded the cost of attending the most expensive private university in America, I frequently found participants sneaking out for hamburgers and French fries at a corner stand. These were all highly motivated people sent to Pritikin by their doctors because of serious, life-threatening health problems, but positive motivation clearly wasn't enough to help them resist phantom hunger. As you know, all dieting programs depend on positive motivation, ignoring the obvious: that there's such power in the emotional forces underlying the desire to binge or overeat that if you don't expose those forces and conquer them, you'll always be at their mercy--

you'll always have weight problems.

In a later chapter, we will discuss the 12 types of emotional hunger that I have identified, but for now, let's point out the main differences between emotional hunger and physical hunger so you can begin to differentiate between the two in your daily life.

First, emotional hunger normally comes on like lightening, while physical hunger develops slowly. Emotional hunger is like a rocket going off: it happens suddenly. Physical hunger develops little by little: first there's the tummy rumble, then the grumble and then it really starts complaining with hunger pangs. But, the slow stages of physical hunger are very different from the quick onset of emotional hunger.

Second, emotional hunger demands food immediately, whereas physical hunger is a bit more patient. Much like its quick onset, emotional hunger demands immediate satisfaction. On the other hand, even if you are ravenously hungry, your physical hunger will wait for food.

The third difference between the two involves mindfulness. Satisfying physical hunger involves a deliberate choice and awareness of what's being eaten. How much of what's being eaten is noticed, meaning you can stop when full. However, emotional hunger on the other hand usually doesn't notice how, why or what's being eaten. Emotional hunger will even demand more food even after the person is stuffed.

Fourth, physical hunger is open to different types of foods, but emotional hunger often demands very particular foods in order to be fulfilled. If you're physically hungry, even carrots will look delicious. If you're emotionally hungry, however, only cake or ice cream might seem appealing.

Fifth, satisfying emotional hunger often results in guilt, or promises to do better next time. This is in sharp contrast with physical hunger, which is viewed as necessary to survival and therefore has no guilt attached to it.

And sixth, emotional hunger, of course, results from something emotionally upsetting, while physical hunger results from a physical need.

Whenever you feel compelled to eat in a way that doesn't match the patience or speed of physical hunger you are struggling with emotional eating and hunger.

Now that you've read this chapter and thought about it a little, it's time for you to personally evaluate how it applies to your life. Below are some questions and activities that you should answer and do before you read the next chapter. Taking these questions and activities seriously will help you get a better understanding of emotional eating.

## Questions

1. How hard is it for you to see emotional eating in your life? Is it very visible? If so, describe the instances you've got in mind. Do you think instances like this are the main obstacle to you losing weight? If it's not so visible, why do you think you have trouble eating less and exercising more?
2. Do you have trouble differentiating between emotional hunger and physical hunger? Describe a time when you may have mistaken emotional hunger for physical hunger. What was happening at the time to make you emotionally hungry? Why didn't you deal with it directly, instead of using food?
3. Examine your hunger whenever it arises. Try to use the six distinctions on page 4 we laid out as a guide. Do you feel emotionally hungry more often than physically hungry? Do you always give into the emotional hunger or do you sometimes find another way to satisfy it without food?



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## Chapter 2

In the last chapter, we discussed emotional eating and hunger and how they compel people to eat. Now we are going to explore how emotional eating really is a symptom of food addiction.

### **Food Addiction**

As we all know, dieting is the most common private approach to being overweight and it just doesn't work. In the last two decades there have been more people dieting and more diet programs yet obesity and weight gain have increased over 20%. Dieting programs and fads have a 99% relapse rate. Their failures have been proven by many studies. And as I've said, the problem is not so much what you eat, but that you can't control how much you eat. This means that you're addicted to food.

This may sound harsh. But, you have all the evidence you need. Do you struggle to control what you eat? Have you been overeating for years? Have you put your health at risk because of your eating habits? Does the idea of giving up food as comfort make you nervous? Have you tried to change your eating habits but failed? If you answered yes to any of these questions, it should be pretty obvious that you are addicted to food.

Many people ask at this point, "Aren't we all addicted to food?" In some sense, yes, everyone is addicted to food. Obviously we need to eat to survive, so in that sense we are always seeking enough to keep us healthy. That's the essential addiction common to all animals. The biological hunger drive is a basic survival mechanism, but that is not what we are talking about here.

When we say food addiction we mean that you are compelled to overeat for reasons other than survival or health. You are not responding to the biological hunger drive. These other reasons fall in the domain of psychology. You may know some of them already, but you don't know all of them, or all of them well enough yet to break the addiction.

Food addiction comes in all sizes. In fact, you can use your weight as a rough measure. If you are a hundred pounds or more overweight that means food is so important to your mental equilibrium that you will sacrifice all your health to keep it as a coping mechanism. If you are twenty to fifty pounds overweight, you are probably very dependent on food, but realize that it's not the only way to handle life. If you just can't seem to lose those last 10 pounds, then you are on the other side of the spectrum and probably use food as a reward, but not too often.

But where does it come from? We all eat every day; so why do some of us become addicted and others don't? The potential for food addiction starts innocently at birth. When a mother feeds her baby, the baby stops crying. Babies equate the mother's milk (food) with survival, love, and peace of mind. Even a pacifier--which has no warmth, taste or nutritional value--is close enough to that primal experience to soothe the infant. It's normal to be addicted to your mother's soothing function as an infant, and easy enough to make food the pathway back

to that comforting state of mind.

As adults, we all continue to use food as a tranquilizer from time to time, and that's ok. But some people begin to overuse this method of coping and little by little it becomes the preferred way of dealing with problems. Using food to cope is okay, but it can get out of control when food is constantly seen as a source of comfort and tranquility. It's ok to eat for sustenance, for the love of food, and even, in moderation, to fend off a blue mood or to give ourselves a reward. But there is a big difference between occasionally using food to fix our moods and compulsively overeating as our primary coping mechanism to deal with the stress and strain of daily life. When someone overeats on a daily basis, it's almost certain that they are addicted to food. The addiction matures slowly over life, but it's not entirely clear why some of people get addicted while others don't.

The worst part about it is that overeating works. It really is a powerful way to change the whole state of your mind, temporarily. If you are anxious, eating can rid you of anxiety. It can give you time to regroup. Some people have described how eating puts them into their own bubble, and makes all the worries go away for a while. Others have described a state of feeling insulated and protected instead of vulnerable and raw. When you are addicted, eating has become a way to silence your mind whenever it presents you with ideas or images you'd rather not deal with. In that sense, it does work; it temporarily banishes uncomfortable thoughts and the feelings associated with them. And when you are addicted to this feeling, you have very little control over how much you eat.

If all this is true, and emotional eating is a sign of food addiction, and if you are really addicted to food, does that mean you have no control over what you eat? That's the interesting dilemma. You always have a choice. It is definitely you that lifts the fork to your mouth or buys the cheeseburger when you just finished telling yourself you were going to watch it and lose some weight. You may make the right choice sometime, but when day after day and year after year you make the decision to overeat (which I define simply as eating much more than you need to stay in caloric balance) then you will have to admit that you are acting like a person who is compelled to do something that you have consciously decided not to do. There is no way around this unless you tell me that you want to overeat and you don't want to control your weight.

In most cases, however, this compulsion to overeat sets up a very painful process. It makes people feel weak and out of control and actually afraid to commit themselves to another diet because they are certain they will not be able to defeat this adversary.

I have heard the inside story of this struggle for decades from patients I have seen. So often I have heard people describe their relationship with food exactly like an addiction. I'll take you through a few examples to let you get an inside look.

Several years ago, I asked Mary, a 35-year-old married mother of two, what it would be like if she finally succeeded in controlling her weight. She said, "I would be on top of the world. Last year I lost about 65 lbs and



I was a totally different person. I could wear really cool clothes instead of the dreaded plus--sized fashions. I didn't hate what I saw in the mirror--it was a stranger looking back at me, but one that I had admired from afar. I was able to get off my blood pressure medication as well. But somehow I knew it was only temporary, because of my lifelong battle with fat. It started with a donut--one donut--and then I would eat three or four at a sitting, especially when my boss was cranky; donuts were my salvation. Now, I hate to buy clothes. I'm back on medication, my knees ache, and I am feeling tired and hopeless again."

Mary had strong motivations to change, but her goals were thwarted by her dependence on food as a source of comfort. When I asked Mary to give herself a positive vision of her future to keep her weight loss efforts on track, she was hesitant to even describe what success might feel like. "My fear of failure is like a ghost in my life chasing me around every day."

We have to look below the surface to understand what's really eroding Mary's confidence. Her personal secret is that she doesn't believe she can actually give up food as her best friend when she is distressed. She's locked in a vicious cycle and she needs help. While she doesn't look like an addict, she is one. Her addiction is legal, socially acceptable--even encouraged--but it's no less destructive than the addictions that have been outlawed or so stigmatized as to become unpopular.

In countless stories similar to this one, I have come to understand the pull of the addiction to food. It didn't surprise me at all to hear one patient say she felt there was a "demon" inside of her tempting her towards food. For many people, their emotional eating habit is so strong they don't believe they can ever break it. Instead, they try to work around it.

For example, Norman was thin when he was younger because he ran four miles each morning, rain or shine, to justify his enormous appetite. Food was the only thing that calmed his anxiety, but he knew he had to compensate for his overeating to stay trim. If he had a fight with his wife, he would stuff himself at dinner, and then just go out and jog another few miles. But after a knee injury, Norman couldn't run anymore. Twenty years later, Norman is 55 and very overweight and he no longer exercises at all.

Jan's story is similar. Early in her marriage, Jan tried bulimia to stay thin. She would eat two dinners and the better part of a cake every evening. Friends marveled at her ability to stay thin. What they didn't see was what she did when she went into the restrooms in her small town. When Jan was finished stuffing herself, she would find a private place and force herself to throw up. As soon as she was finished, she promised herself never to do it again, but the next time she found herself bingeing, she had to purge to make up for it. Jan was fortunate enough to find people who could help her beat her addiction. Millions more are not that lucky. Bulimia is their way of compensating for their primary addiction to food. They can't give up their insatiable need for food, so they control their weight through vomiting, tearing up their insides in the process.

Emotional eaters have become dependent on food to survive the challenges of daily life. There's no other way

to explain their behavior or craving. They are addicted to food as much as an alcoholic to alcohol, a smoker to smoking, or an addict to drugs. They don't think they can make it without this handy non-prescription tranquilizer, and they're fearful of trying to do so. In that sense, overeating has become a mental compulsion. It's not that they really want to overeat, but that they are compelled to overeat. This sometimes-useful coping mechanism is transformed into a compulsion because it works so well, but only for a short time. That means that every time they are distressed, they automatically generate an image in their head of which food will make them feel better. These activated images of relief are there to tempt them until they're satisfied. That's how a compulsion works.

Unless an emotional eater finds a new way to make peace with his or her distress warnings, the unconscious compulsion to overeat will win out time and time again. It will win no matter how motivated and disciplined the dieters consider themselves. Even those who succeed in losing weight for a year or more find this strange inner opponent coming back to claim yet another victory after they hit a stressful patch in their life. Until food addiction is broken and the emotional eating pattern under control, weight loss is impossible.

Now that you've read this chapter and thought about it a little, it's time for you to personally evaluate how it applies to your life. Below are some questions for you to think about until you read the next chapter.

### Questions

1. Try to pinpoint the times when you were tempted to break your diet or overeat. What were the main causes? Were you anxious or angry? How about depressed or stressed? If you do eat during these times, how specifically did it make you feel? Content or safe? Numb or detached? How many distinct patterns can you identify?
2. Beside emotional eating patterns, what evidence for food addiction can you find in your life? Your weight might be one piece of evidence, but there is probably more if you think about it. Try to think of at least a few things besides your weight that show food addiction plays a major part in your life.

Hint: In what ways have you acted in the past that might seem strange to someone who didn't suffer from food addiction?

3. You undoubtedly have positive motivations to lose weight. What are these positive motivations? Try describing what you would feel like if you reached your target weight. After you're done, ask yourself why these motivations aren't strong enough to carry you to success?



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## Chapter 3

During the last two chapters we discussed emotional eating and food addiction. Now, we are going to talk about how food addiction starts and the initial steps to breaking it.

### Learning the Patterns

Just like everything you know how to do in your life, you learned to be addicted to food. We touched on this subject in the last chapter when we discussed how people overeat because it worked for them.

All addictions follow the same basic pattern. First, you are in a distressed state of mind and the substance (whether it be alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, or cupcakes) offers you almost instant, albeit temporary, relief from your distress. If it works the first time, you do it again, and again. When it becomes the mechanism of choice, you are addicted. It is the short route to the temporary control of personal stress. If you are addicted now, it means you became too dependent on this mechanism and you created a short circuit to feeling good that now works against you.

It's a short circuit in many ways. It's the fastest route to feeling better, so in that way it is literally a short circuit. But it is also a short circuit in another sense. The more you use this mechanism, the more you bypass some essential work of life, and short circuit the new learning and new ways of managing your feelings that can make life more fulfilling and a lot easier. You are trading the short-term gain for a real long term-loss.

The more you eat, the more you avoid doing what is necessary to resolve the stress, depression, and anxiety in real life. The more you avoid, the less you learn about how to manage your mind and your life, or at least those critical parts of you that have not fully matured and been brought under rational control. It's a vicious cycle. Gradually the stabilization of mood and mind state is more important than the rational and thoughtful management of your life.

It may feel like this pattern has been with you since birth, but it has not. You learned that eating can give you relief, so you eat. But, you can unlearn it. Realizing this is one of the first steps on the road to recovery.

Although food addiction is learned behavior, I don't want to make it seem that the unlearning process is just a matter of education or reverse engineering. No, once food has become installed as a primary regulator of mood and emotions, it is an essential part of the person's mind, or at least feels that way. Food is no longer food. The taste is largely irrelevant. It's the mental effect that is being looked for in the burrito, not the calories or the flavor.

Some have described the relationship between the self and food as that of a lover that you jealously possess, horde, hide and clandestinely have as your own. There is a great deal of truth in that description, but it doesn't quite get to the quality I hear in my patients. What I hear is that it is more like this eating pattern has become a

part of one's mental self the same way an arm is part of one's bodily self, and defended in a parallel way. You wouldn't let anybody convince you to cut off your arm. In the same way, you won't let anybody convince you to give up this mechanism of internal control. This is why unlearning food addiction is so hard. It feels like you are unlearning an essential part of yourself.

Food addiction has the same imperative quality as the heroin addict who has to have his fix, or the smoker who must have one more drag, or the alcoholic who must have one more drink. If this comparison seems too harsh, think about how many people you know, maybe even including yourself, who have endangered their health through their eating habits. This is what we are up against when we battle food addiction. On some level we learned the behavior as adults or in our youth, but it goes even deeper than that; food addiction goes deeper than nicotine, alcohol or cocaine ever could. We need food to survive; it is even mixed with happiness in our infancy. Unlearning food addiction, or better yet, rebalancing your relationship to food, for this reason is not a simple process. It's not just a matter of reading one chapter and being cured. And you obviously can't go cold turkey from food to sober up!

Nevertheless, you do not need food to handle your emotions, your stress, or your internal critic; you do not need to overeat to handle your life; you do not need to overeat to make things feel okay, although it probably feels like you do. The process of breaking food addiction is learning that you don't need to overeat to be okay. It's usually a rocky road, but you can succeed.

### **The First Step: Confronting Denial**

Everyone who is addicted to food in the way we have been discussing has the same starting point in this healing process.

You know, but you don't really know. That is to say, you are living with a big internal contradiction about your addictive relationship to food. Some may call it denial. You know there's a problem, and you know you know. But, you know you are afraid to dig to find out what is below the surface. You may be reluctant to go there, but you are not in denial that you need to go there. If you were in total denial, you probably wouldn't be reading this right now.

Let me tell you about Kaisa, who is a 49-year old married woman, who at 5'4' weighs 202 lbs. She said the following as I began to help her with emotional eating and food addiction:

"I am generally quite a happy person, living a fulfilled life. Why then is there a feeling of being unfulfilled in me that seems to be fulfilled only by sweet carbohydrates? I just can't imagine a day without dessert. Without having a dessert I would be anxious and missing something for the rest of the evening."

As a psychiatrist, the first thing I see in this statement is the addiction. She may indeed be a happy person, but she is also an addicted person who is trying to get rid of the feeling of being unfulfilled. And from my way of

thinking this is a contradiction. She may be happy on the surface, but she is covering up something important, something that just doesn't go away for very long.

Let's examine another starting point. Helen, a housewife in her early thirties said this about her eating habits:

"I don't keep my weight in mind when I sit down to a gourmet meal, so I eat as much as I want to. Therefore, I don't control my portions. I don't listen to my body and eat not only to satisfy my hunger, but mostly for the pleasure of eating, that I want to prolong. My diet is not well balanced because I eat too many sweets."

This is what I see in case after case. Dieters like Helen know enough information to analyze a situation and give advice to themselves. But, that is not enough to be able to do something. It's only a baby step in that direction; it's a little bit more knowledge, a little bit more consciousness, but it's still just scratching the surface.

That's the position in which I find almost everybody who starts this process and I presume that is where you are. They know there's a problem, but they are afraid of moving forward or getting everything out in the open.

While working with Kaisa, I helped her think about what it would be like if she didn't begin to change her eating habits. Here's her sober prediction of the future if she doesn't make these changes. She wrote:

"I would simply not lose weight or even gain weight. I will focus more and more on eating as a source of pleasure and this will diminish me as a human being and prevent me from growing and focusing on things that are worth it. I will feel out of control. My self-esteem will diminish. I would hate every morning, waking up and realizing how I look and having to put on clothes that are too small and too tight. I will be afraid of food instead of enjoying it."

This negative vision of the future is a strong motivator to do something in the present, but it is still not strong enough to combat the compulsion to overeat below the surface. The hope for success and the vision of what failure means has been there for years and hasn't done the job.

As our work moved on, Kaisa realized she was not just a happy person who had a compulsion to eat too many sweets. There was much more to the picture. She realized she overate whenever she was depressed, bored or feeling empty. She ate too much when her children clung to her, when her husband neglected or ignored her, when she had no one to talk to.

As I talked to Kaisa about these issues, it became more and more apparent that she would eat when no one was there because she was lonely. As she began to let this secret out of her, as she began to acknowledge this fact, and as she snipped the last threads of denial, she began to really make progress.

Think about your own state of denial. What part of your relationship to food are you aware of but reluctant to

acknowledge out in the open? Don't let this exercise lead you to despair. Just try to let some secrets out of the bag. It will help.

Everyone who is still addicted is in some form of denial because that denial fends off a worse feeling, the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness, which probably feels like a vague but powerful shadow hanging over your life. The denial has a twisted logic that goes something like this: "Why know all about something that I can't do anything about." But as you continue with these chapters, and continue on your path to recovery, I hope to show you that you can do something about this addiction, and that you are not helpless, and the problem is not hopeless. You can unlearn emotional eating, but the first step is to get past this hopelessness and to start letting go of denial.

### **The Second Step: The 12 Types of Emotional Hunger**

The second step to stopping food addiction is to become familiar with the 12 types of emotional hunger. The more you can "see" your own reasons to continue your addiction to food, the more clear you will be that there is something you can do about it, even though you will probably need some form of help and guidance to do it well and effectively.

Through my research and practice, I've identified 12 distinct sources of emotional hunger, each driven by a different type of motivation. These different types of emotional hunger are what fuel emotional eating patterns, make you overeat, and until they are handled without food, will keep your food addiction alive. You'll probably recognize some of these motivations easily, while others will seem less applicable to your life. Some of these may not apply to you, which is good. However, battling just one of these can be difficult.

#### **Type 1. Dulling The Pain With The Food Trance.**

If you get hungry when you feel angry, depressed, anxious, bored, or lonely, you suffer from Type 1 emotional hunger, and you use food to dull the pain that these emotions cause.

#### **Type 2. Sticks And Stones May Break Your Bones, But Cake Won't Heal What Hurts You.**

If you react by getting hungry when others talk down to you, take advantage of you, belittle you or take you for granted, then you suffer from Type 2 emotional hunger. You eat to avoid confrontation.

#### **Type 3. A Full Heart Fills An Empty Belly.**

If you crave food when you have tension in your close relationships, you suffer from Type 3 emotional hunger. You eat to avoid feeling the pain of rejection or anger.

#### **Type 4. Hate Yourself, Love Your Munchies.**

If you tend to become hypercritical of yourself, if you label yourself "stupid," "lazy," or "a loser," you have Type 4 emotional hunger. You eat to "stuff down" your self-hatred.

**Type 5. Secret Desires Have No Calories.**

If your hunger gets activated because your intimate relationships don't satisfy some basic need like trust or security, you suffer from Type 5 emotional hunger and you use food to try to fill the gap.

**Type 6. Forty Million Big Gulps And The Well Is Still Empty.**

If you stuff yourself to make up for the deprivation you experienced as a child, you have Type 6 emotional hunger

**Type 7. It's My Pastry, and I'll Eat If I Want To.**

If you eat to assert your independence because you don't want anyone telling you what to do, you have Type 7 emotional hunger.

**Type 8. I Can't Come To Work Today-- I'm Too Fat.**

If your appetite kicks in when you're faced with new challenges--if you use food to avoid rising to the test, or to insulate yourself from the fear of failure--you have Type 8 emotional hunger.

**Type 9. Aroused by Aromas, Not by the Chef.**

If you eat in order to avoid your sexuality--either to stay fat so that nobody desires you or to hide from intimate encounters--you suffer from Type 9 emotional eating.

**Type 10. I'll Beat You With this Eclair.**

Type 10 emotional eaters stuff themselves to pay back those who have hurt them, often in the distant past. They use their bodies as battlegrounds for working out old resentments.

**Type 11. Peter Pan and the Peanut Butter Cookie.**

If you eat to make yourself feel carefree, like a child, you have Type 11 emotional hunger. You eat to keep yourself from facing the challenges of growing up.

**Type 12. That Stranger In Lycra Wearing Your Face.**

If you overeat because you fear getting thin, either consciously or unconsciously, you have Type 12 emotional hunger.

Experience has shown me that you can't treat all of these very different motivations in the same way--each requires a distinct strategy. For instance, if people have talked down to you all your life, you might have become sensitive to that behavior, and your hunger gets triggered whenever someone belittles or patronizes you. You eat to give yourself comfort, to lessen the sting of insult. First you shut down, and then you eat. Your strategy will involve finding the appropriate behavior to address the grievance directly. On the other hand, if you overeat because you want to avoid sexual intimacy, you have a very different set of motivations, and you'll need to do a different type of work.

I suggest you read over this list several times. Try to think of times that these types of emotional hunger drove you to eat. The more you are familiar with these different types, the easier it will be to recognize them in the future, which means you'll have more control!

Now that you've read this chapter and thought about it a little, it's time for you to personally evaluate how it applies to your life. Taking these questions and activities seriously will help you get a better understanding of emotional eating.

### Questions

1. Can you identify a time when you began to seek food for comfort? What was happening in your life at the time? If you can't remember when you started using food for comfort, try to describe the time when this habit intensified or became more severe.
2. How would you feel if you had to give up the habit of eating when you're upset emotionally? Describe what your life might feel like. Part of you probably says that you'll be fine, but what does the other part say? What does the part of you that's scared of giving up emotional eating say?
3. What part of your relationship with food are you in denial about? Which part would you rather not know about? How might you get this out in the open to yourself? What would happen if you did this?
4. Which of the 12 types of emotional hunger do you suffer from most? What are some ways you could begin to change your habit of eating when faced with emotional hunger like this?



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# Chapter 4

We've been discussing emotional eating and food addiction -- how it develops and the hope for recovery. The next logical step is to discuss what you can really do about this addiction.

## **Attacking The Addiction**

Let me start by saying that attacking the emotional eating addiction directly is the only way that works. Trying to hold onto the emotional eating addiction and working around it never works for long.

With that said, let me briefly tell you about six different ways that people try to work around, or hold onto, their emotional eating addiction. So many of my patients follow a weight loss regimen that looks good, sounds good, and seems to work for a while, but ultimately fails. Let's take a look and see why.

You certainly know people following such regimens. Neighbor John runs five miles a day and still has a potbelly. Sister Lara goes to Weight Watchers, drops twenty pounds, and then gains it all back when her boyfriend jilts her. Uncle Ron follows the Zone Diet, although recently you noticed candy bar wrappers in his briefcase.

All these people follow weight loss methods that rely on deprivation and discipline and nicely avoid dealing with the issues that drive overeating, emotional eating and food addiction. I call such methods "the failure strategies," and if you want to avoid wasting any more of your time and energy on strategies bound to backfire, then you have to give up relying on methods like these.

Of course, everything you know about weight loss to this point in your life endorses these approaches, so it might seem odd to you to disparage them now, to reject them as doomed methods. Please notice that I'm not telling you to eat with abandon or to give up exercise--not at all. I'm simply letting you know that these approaches won't work on their own. Just remember that 99% of all diets ultimately fail.

## **The Failure "Strategies"**

### **Failure Strategy #1: Deprive and Binge**

Almost every single diet book and diet plan leads to the deprive-and-binge approach, and so this is the most common strategy. It begins with deprivation. As you know, when you diet, you deprive yourself of what you really want, applying willpower and discipline to keep yourself away from the fridge. It's a painful and difficult thing to do, and unfortunately, the method doesn't work for long because you really don't want to deprive yourself. Eventually, your emotional eating patterns kick in, and then the diet ends. Willpower can only work for so long. Unless you are really addressing your emotional hunger and food addiction, this approach can never work.

### **Failure Strategy #2: Binge and Run**

This is the approach where you allow yourself to overeat, or try to exist side by side with your addiction, but try to compensate for it with exercise. Compensating your diet with exercise is essential, but it only works if you also limit your diet and try to break your food addiction. This strategy doesn't work primarily because in order to compensate for eating excess, you have to exercise so much that you increase the risk of injury, which poses special problems if exercise is your chief weight loss method. Any time you need to stop exercising in order to heal, your weight balloons up quickly. I've seen patients in my practice who put on substantial weight after injuries and then couldn't lose it, though they had been trim athletes at one time--albeit athletes with food addiction. Also, if you continue to eat unhealthy foods in excess, you weaken your immune system no matter how much you exercise, and so the risk of illness increases, illness makes exercise difficult, and anytime the routine slackens, the weight returns.

### **Failure Strategy #3: Binge and Purge**

The binge and purge cycle of bulimia is a very dangerous strategy, and luckily it is normally viewed as an unhealthy approach to weight management. People can die from the electrolyte imbalance that happens with chronic purging, or they can end up with chronic esophagitis and gastritis, various forms of malnutrition and vitamin deficiency, and a secret life of agonizing shame. They appear to be thin, "together" people on the outside, but they feel like frauds on the inside. Bulimia is a very "expensive way" to control weight, and it must be given up before too much damage is done. There is no possibility for success with this strategy, but people try to hang onto their food addiction by compensating for it through purging.

### **Failure Strategy #4: Going Public**

I call the fourth failure strategy "Going Public." I've seen many variations of this strategy, including losing weight for a specific event such as an upcoming wedding or family reunion, or making a public declaration that you've started a diet, or buying clothes that fit only if you lose weight, or paying to join a support group that encourages success, but rejects you if you fail. There are many other ways to set yourself up to "have to" succeed, all of which lead to failure because the basic emotional eating problem is not addressed. Try as you may, you can't fool your own emotions.

### **Failure Strategy #5: The Blame Game**

Do you curse parental genes for giving you a slow metabolism? If so, you've fallen prey to the fifth failure method--blaming the extra pounds on your metabolism. You might say that the blame game is more of a "failure attitude" than a failure strategy, but here the watchword is "failure." As long as you believe that genetics predispose you to being fat, you can tell yourself that your hunger is written "in the stars" and indulge your emotional eating habit whenever life gets difficult, doing nothing to change the underlying pattern.

I have seen so many patients who have made this claim, supporting it by telling me how diligent they have been about exercising and how careful they have been about their intake. When I do a detailed inquiry about their exercise and eating habits, it turns out that they have simply been fooling themselves. One patient, Joe,

was a real classic. He didn't bother to count the three beers at night or the daily trip to the ice cream store. Somehow those calories didn't count. Most of the others failed to count little things that added up, and almost all didn't exercise nearly enough to compensate for what they ate.

As long as you blame the extra pounds on a slow metabolism, you've fallen prey to another ruse-unless, of course, you've been diagnosed with hypothyroidism or take certain prescribed medications. Some medications do cause weight gain, either by changing your metabolic rate, making you retain fluids, or by affecting how your body converts calories to energy versus storing calories as fat. That's a different story. But if you don't have hypothyroidism or prescription drugs to blame, then your metabolic rate is in the normal range and you need to gain control over your eating habits in order to lose weight.

It might be true that you have a metabolism that's a little faster or a bit slower than your neighbor's, and beginning at age 25 it does become slightly slower over time. It is indeed more difficult to stay thin if you have the slowest metabolism on the block or if you're well into middle age. You do need to eat less and exercise more than your neighbors do in order to stay in balance, but balancing calories in and calories burned is still the only answer.

Blaming metabolism instead of your eating habits is just a way to avoid taking responsibility or a way to avoid giving up your patterns.

### **Failure Strategy #6: Medicate the Hunger, Trick the Metabolism**

In our culture, many seek a magic pill to dissolve cellulite, reverse weight gain, and make getting thin a breeze. This search constitutes the sixth and final failure strategy.

All the pharmaceutical companies are looking for the big blockbuster solution that will control the hunger gland. The last "miracle pill" released on the market, Phen-Phen, ended up killing people. The drug companies haven't given up though, since the American public would much rather take pills that kill hunger than address the emotional source of the compulsion to overeat.

Phen-Phen wasn't the first weight loss medication to endanger health. Dexedrine, a form of speed, was commonly used for weight loss but has largely been discredited. Many people who started taking Dexedrine to lose weight ended up addicted, less hungry and less dependent on food, but more dependent on the drug. Speed increases your resting metabolic rate so that you burn more calories without having to exercise, stimulates a more rapid heart rate, and makes you sweat more. You stay up later and you have more energy to move around, but you can't use the method for long without physical damage. The speed category includes Ephedra, which is a major ingredient of many herbal appetite suppressants.

The same problems exist with thyroid supplements. If your thyroid is intact, taking more to speed yourself up will work for a while, but at a cost to your natural balance. And as long as you continue to eat too much and

don't address food addiction directly, the method won't work and your health will suffer.

### **Reality Always Wins**

Now you've seen that the six failure strategies don't work because they all attempt to stimulate weight loss while keeping the emotional eating option intact. When you follow one of the failure strategies, you make a hopeless bargain with yourself: "I will deprive myself for a while as long as I can go back to bingeing some-time. I will discipline myself to run, as long as I can eat as much as I want when I am anxious. I will risk my health and harbor a shameful secret of purging as long as I can stuff myself at dinner. I will suffer public shame in order to overeat again. I will mess up my insides with speed and attack my hunger rather than attack the sources of emotional eating. I will blame my metabolism for my weight and put myself at risk for obesity related diseases so I can eat what I want."

These strategies circumvent the reality of emotional eating. They keep the emotional eating habit alive in a rainy-day bank account in case you need it to cope with the next life stress. In a sense, when you use any of these strategies, you try to create a new alternative: the "don't surrender, don't attack, hope to win" strategy. Unfortunately, you can't win as long as you hold the eating remedy in reserve for difficult times, because reality guarantees that you'll backslide under stress, throw off that delicate "calories in-calories out" balance, and put the pounds right back on.

Now that you've read this chapter and thought about it a little, it's time for you to personally evaluate how it applies to your life. Taking these questions and activities seriously will help you get a better understanding of emotional eating.

### **Questions**

1. Think back to a time when you tried to lose weight with one of the failure strategies. Describe the attempt in detail. Was emotional eating the main reason it was unsuccessful? If not, why didn't that strategy work?
2. Assume you are going to attack your emotional eating patterns by yourself. What strategies are you going to use that you haven't tried before?
3. Assume you have to choose one of the basic approaches to ending emotional eating. What are the pros and cons of each one? List them and try to come to a decision about which is best.



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# Conclusion

If you want to control your weight for a lifetime, you do have to attack and dismantle the emotional eating habit. There is no way around this. Food must become food again so you can have control and make healthy choices without having to fight off the intense cravings that are part of the emotional eating habit. To break the addiction to food, you will have to go through a healing process.

You will have to face each of your sources of emotional hunger and find a way, through decisions and actions, to deal with the underlying life issues without using food to cover them up. It's not enough to simply recognize these sources. You will have to do something about them to put them to rest. You will have to use your intelligent conscious problem-solving mind, not cover up your problems, fears, self-doubts and boredom with food. It's not something that you can do overnight.

It's a process you have to learn, and a life skill you have to practice.

## Your Alternatives

If you are convinced that you have to address your food addiction now, here are your alternatives.

1. Find a good therapist who understands this addiction and will guide you through the healing process.
2. Find a support group that will tackle and keep a focus on the 12 motivations for overeating, and will be sophisticated enough to help you develop new skills in living in order to master these motivations.
3. Try to do it yourself, using what you learned in this e-book
4. Use our [Shrink Yourself Online Program](#) and our online Emotional Eating Experts to help you.
5. Form your own support group, and let the [Shrink Yourself Online Program](#) become the guide and workbook for the group.

If you truly want to lose weight for life, and if you really want to break food addiction, these are your logical choices. Some are easier than others. No one can tell you what's right for you and it may take some experimentation on your part to find the right approach. Nevertheless, we urge you to choose one today and begin working on it as soon as possible. If you are ready, and you procrastinate, it's only going to be harder to start. Most people hesitate because they are afraid of failing. Others hesitate because they are afraid of succeeding. Neither of these are good reasons. No one ever regrets trying to end food addiction. They only regret giving in to it, and suffering the consequences of yo-yo dieting.

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