



CONNECTIONS

A NEWSLETTER ABOUT FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS & PERSONAL GROWTH

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*"Out-of-control eating is often associated with out-of-control emotions."
Nydia Gracia Preto*

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS



10 Ways to Avoid Emotional Eating

by W. Jared DuPree

1 REPLACE OBSESSIONS.

Most people that emotionally eat obsess about eating or not eating. Learning to replace

negative obsessions with positive thoughts (e.g., reading a book, taking a walk, enjoying hobbies, etc.) and behaviors can help stop the negative cycle.

2 SURROUND YOURSELF WITH TRUSTING PEOPLE.

If you are constantly surrounded by people who judge you or put you down, you will tend to judge yourself and put yourself down. Surround yourself with people that care about the real you.

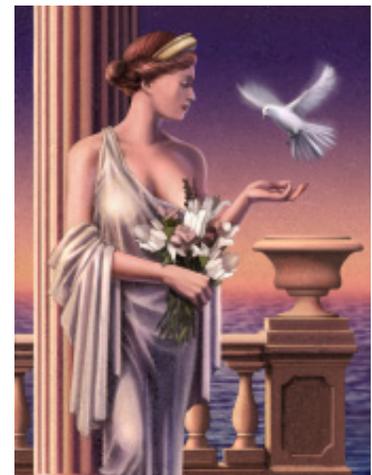
3 RATHER THAN AVOID PAIN, HEAL.

A lot of people use eating to cover up pain. Be willing to face pain and heal within yourself or with others.

4 SET APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES.

Some people like to help everyone and not receive help; others enjoy being the victim/martyr and focus too much on self. Learn to balance your life and allow yourself to be helped as well as to help others.

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FROM THE DESK OF

Charlotte Shoup Olsen



Emotional Eating in Kansas

There is much attention being focused on obesity with initiatives coming forth from funding agencies to address this issue. Diet and exercise are inextricably linked to obesity as well as a person's emotional states and relations with others. Thus, we have taken one small step in acknowledging the complex interplay of variables by focusing this month's

Connections on emotional eating. Some of you may already be involved in 'obesity' programming as other Extension faculty from several departments are committed to long-range and sustained work in this area.

Charlotte Shoup Olsen
W. Jared DuPree

Answers to Questions from Kansas County Extension Agents

Question:

Tell me more about the upcoming satellite conference on December 2 and 9, 10-noon each session, called *The Impact of Couple and Marital Relationships on Parenting and Child Outcomes.*

Answer:

This satellite conference, in two parts, is designed to help participants learn about how the quality of married and unmarried couple relationships affect their children's well-being. Other topics to be discussed are: "What has more influence on parenting quality—marriage and couples education or parenting education?"; "How to use research to improve couple programs to positively affect parenting skills"; and "How to implement and measure impact of couples education programs for parents."

This information would be relevant for family life educators, Extension personnel, social workers, and other professionals (or students in training) who plan to work with families. Group sites will be held at the Northwest Area Extension Office, Southeast Area Extension Office, K-State campus (Waters 137), Johnson County Extension Office, and Finney County Extension Office (December 2 only). Another option would be to sign up to watch streaming video at your own computer, but it limits the discussion with other professionals. Please email pseele@oznet.ksu.edu by November 21, to register for one of the group sites or to watch it in your office. Please also include any community collaborators you would like to invite. There is no cost as K-State is a state partner for the satellite conference.

Please contact Charlotte Olsen or Chuck Smith if you have more questions.

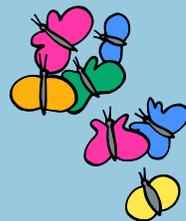
Extension Spotlight

Nancy Peterson

Nancy B. Peterson has been a Communications Specialist with K-State Research and Extension since 1996. Prior to coming to K-State, Nancy had been an associate editor with *Farm Journal*, *Grit* and *Best Recipes Magazines*, and Director of Publications and editor of *The Bethany Magazine* at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas. She earned her B.S. degree in Home Economics from Purdue University and has supplemental course work from the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania, and Kansas State University.

Nancy's job with Extension is to market Extension programs through writing news releases. She frequently captures a timely issue by interviewing Extension faculty who can speak to the subject at hand to educate the public on a timely basis and to provide visibility for our system. K-State Research and Extension news releases are typically distributed electronically to more than 500 news outlets, including members of the Kansas Press Association, USDA Radio, wire services, and Extension offices. The Family and Consumer Sciences stories she writes often have an extended print life and many are picked up by both large and small newspapers.

Nancy also monitors Profnet queries and matches K-State Research and Extension specialists to national media requests. Her extra efforts have paid off with faculty being quoted in such publications as *Women's Day*, *Family Circle*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*.



"I firmly believe there has never been a greater need for Extension to help families, youth, and communities."

Nancy Peterson

Nancy is particularly interested in family issues as they relate to parenting, nutrition and health, food safety, youth development, community service, and citizenship. Her professional legacy led to her selection in 2001 as one of 75 Purdue University graduates to be honored in recognition of community service and professionalism in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the School of Home Economics (now Consumer and Family Sciences). It is no wonder that she received this award as Nancy can often be heard saying, "I love my work!" Nancy also has been honored for her leadership and work by the Topeka Association of Family and Consumer Sciences and has received the Clover Award from the Kansas 4-H Agents Association.



PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT



Are You an Emotional Eater!

Excerpts from an article by Maryann Hammers Retrieved August 15, 2005, from: http://www.findarticles.com/pl/articles/mi_m0846/is_1_23/ai_107488118/print

Linda Spangle, R.N., M.A., author of *Life Is Hard, Food Is Easy: The 5-Step Plan to Overcome Emotional Eating and Lose Weight on Any Diet* (LifeLine Press, 2003) presents information based on theoretical principles and common themes found in the research on weight loss. "It's often not a growling tummy but raging emotions that prompt us to raid the fridge or line up at the fast-food counter," says Spangle who operates a

weight-loss clinic in Denver. She believes that food cravings reveal a lot about you. They show what's going on inside your head—and your heart. "Food choices often act as a mirror, showing exactly which emotions are prompting the desire to overeat," she says. Once you determine that you may be using food too frequently to fix your feelings, the first step to dropping pounds, according to Spangle, is to zero in on what you're craving: mashed potatoes and chocolate cake, for example, or potato chips and chewy raisin cookies?

If you suspect your emotions are making you overeat, Spangle presents ten questions in her book based on current research to help you determine why. Feelings of anger, stress, frustration, resentment, burnout, bitterness, self-disgust or being overwhelmed and/or your desire for excitement may cause you to seek out different foods than if you are struggling with feelings such as boredom, loneliness, sadness, grief, depression, restlessness, hurt or disappointment, hopelessness, an overwhelming need for love or attention and/or a lack of meaning in your life. You also may be feeling fatigued or ill. However, Spangle is careful to say that emotions are not always to blame for weight management. Eating patterns and/or exercise programs (or lack of one) may be the culprits.

If emotional eating seems to be your problem, Spangle poses five questions in her book to help you conquer emotional eating. If you circle three or fewer responses it means emotional eating is not likely to be a problem for you. You may occasionally use food to cope, but for the most part, it doesn't hamper your weight-management efforts. You'll benefit from answering all the questions in sequence, but also can use each individually as a quick strategy for managing food temptations. The next time you're heading for the kitchen, ask yourself:



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Emotional Eating: Feeding Your Feelings

By [Heather Hatfield, DMD](#) Feature
Reviewed By [Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RD, LD](#)

“Eating to feed a feeling, and not a growling stomach, is emotional eating.”

When you're happy, your food of choice could be steak or pizza, when you're sad it could be ice cream or cookies, and when you're bored it could be potato chips. Food does more than fill our stomachs—it also satisfies feelings, and when you quench those feelings with food when your stomach isn't growling, that's emotional eating.

“Emotional eating is eating for reasons other than hunger,” says Jane Jakubczak, a registered dietitian at the University of Maryland. “Instead of the physical symptom of hunger initiating the eating, an emotion triggers the eating.”

How to Tell the Difference

There are several differences between emotional hunger and physical hunger, according to the University of Texas Counseling and Mental Health Center web site:

- Emotional hunger comes on suddenly; physical hunger occurs gradually.
- When you are eating to fill a void that isn't related to an empty stomach, you crave a specific food, such as pizza or ice cream, and only that food will meet your need. When you eat because you are actually hungry, you're open to options.
- Emotional hunger feels like it needs to be satisfied instantly with the food you crave; physical hunger can wait.
- Even when you are full, if you're eating to satisfy an emotional need, you're more likely to keep eating. When you're eating because you're hungry, you're more likely to stop when you're full.

- Emotional eating can leave behind feelings of guilt; eating when you are physically hungry does not.

Comfort Foods

When emotional hunger rumbles, one of its distinguishing characteristics is that you're focused on a particular food, which is likely a comfort food.

“Comfort foods are foods a person eats to obtain or maintain a feeling,” says Brian Wansink, PhD, director of the Food and Brand Lab at the University of Illinois. “Comfort foods are often wrongly associated with negative moods, and indeed, people often consume them when they're down or depressed, but interestingly enough, comfort foods are also consumed to maintain good moods.”

Ice cream is first on the comfort food list. After ice cream, comfort foods break down by gender: For women it's chocolate and cookies; for men it's pizza, steak, and casserole, explains Wansink. And what you reach for when eating to satisfy an emotion depends on the emotion. According to an article by Wansink, published in the July 2000 *American Demographics*, “The types of comfort foods a person is drawn toward varies depending on their mood. People in happy moods tended to prefer...foods such as pizza or steak (32%). Sad people reached for ice cream and cookies 39% of the time, and 36% of bored people opened up a bag of potato chips.”

Overfeeding Emotions

“We all eat for emotional reasons sometimes,”

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Emotional Eating: Feeding Your Feelings

says Jakubczak. When eating becomes the only or main strategy a person uses to manage emotions, explains Jakubczak, then problems arise — especially if the foods a person is choosing to eat to satisfy emotions aren't exactly healthy.

“If you eat when you are not hungry, chances are your body does not need the calories,” says Jakubczak. “If this happens too often, the extra calories get stored as fat, and too much fat storage can cause one to be overweight, which may present some health risks.”

According to an interview with Jakubczak on the University of Maryland web site, 75% of overeating is caused by emotions, so dealing with emotions appropriately is important.

Recognizing Emotional Eating

“The first thing one needs to do to overcome emotional eating is to recognize it,” says Jakubczak. “Keeping a food record and ranking your hunger from 1-10 each time you put something in your mouth will bring to light ‘if’ and ‘when’ you are eating for reasons other than hunger.”

Next, you need to learn techniques that help manage emotions besides eating, explains Jakubczak.

“Oftentimes when a child is sad, we cheer them up with a sweet treat,” says Jakubczak. “This behavior gets reinforced year after year until we are practicing the same behavior as adults. We never learned how to deal with the sad feeling because we always pushed it away with a sweet treat. Learning how to deal with feelings without food is a new skill many of us need to learn.”

Managing Emotional Eating

Recognize emotional eating and learn what

triggers this behavior in you.

- Make a list of things to do when you get the urge to eat and you're not hungry, and carry it with you, according to the Tufts Nutrition web site. When you feel overwhelmed, you can put off that desire by doing another enjoyable activity.
- Try taking a walk, calling a friend, playing cards, cleaning your room, doing laundry, or something productive to take your mind off the craving — even taking a nap, according to the Tufts Nutrition web site.
- When you do get the urge to eat when you're not hungry, find a comfort food that's healthy instead of junk food. “Comfort foods don't need to be unhealthy,” says Wansink.
- For some, leaving comfort foods behind when they're dieting can be emotionally difficult. “The key is moderation, not elimination,” says Wansink. suggests dividing comfort foods into smaller portions. For instance, if you have a large bag of chips, divide it into smaller containers or baggies and the temptation to eat more than one serving can be avoided.
- When it comes to comfort foods that aren't always healthy, like fattening desserts, Wansink also offers this piece of information: “Your memory of a food peaks after about four bites, so if you only have those bites, a week later you'll recall it as just a good experience than if you polished off the whole thing.” So have a few bites of cheesecake, then call it quits, and you'll get equal the pleasure with lower cost.

Lastly, remember that emotional eating is something that most people do when they're bored, happy, or sad. It might be a bag of chips or a steak, but whatever the food choice, learning how to control it and using moderation are key.

Originally published Nov. 11, 2003. Medically updated June 29, 2005. Retrieved August 15, 2005, from <http://my.webmd.com/content/article/76/90283.htm>



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10 Ways to Avoid Emotional Eating



5 LOVE YOUR INSIDES. Too many of us place value on ourselves that is based on physical or material attributes. Learn to love your internal characteristics and attributes.

6 TAKE CARE OF YOUR TRUE NEEDS. Sleep when you need rest, connect when you are lonely, relax when you are stressed, etc.

7 FIND ALTERNATIVE COPING STRATEGIES. Read, take a walk, exercise, go out with friends, go to church, etc. when you are stressed. There are many ways to cope!

8 BE WILLING TO FORM CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS. Relationships seem to be the greatest trigger for emotional eating; they also seem to be the greatest buffer. Form close relationships to gain support and understanding.

9 BE HONEST. Many emotional eaters have difficulty with being assertive. They believe they must be passive in order to avoid aggression. Assertiveness is different. It allows one to be honest, direct, and bold in a respectful manner.

10 AVOID PERFECTIONISM. Unrealistic expectations lead to ultimate failure. Placing realistic expectations on ourselves allows us to breathe and enjoy life.

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Are You an Emotional Eater?

- What's going on? When you're not hungry but you want to eat anyway, think for a minute about what is affecting you or contributing to your desire to eat.
- What do I feel? Identify your emotions. Are you angry? Lonely? Bored? Be as specific as possible in labeling what you feel.
- What do I need? Where are the gaps in your life? Do you need more rest? Companionship? Time alone? Ask yourself, "What do I need right now, and how could I take care of this need?" If you are being bombarded by several needs at once, try to nail down which is the highest priority.
- What's in my way? What are the barriers that prevent you from taking care of your needs or

expressing your emotions? Are you exhausted, overwhelmed or stressed? Tired of thinking about your problems? Can you figure out a way to push past your roadblocks and take care of yourself rather than simply to eat something?

- What will I do? What's your intention or goal? What will it take to make that happen? Decide on a precise action you can do now to manage your emotional needs instead of reaching for food—and then do it!

