



FOR CAREGIVERS

# Emotional Eating

## Physical vs. emotional hunger

Everyone has engaged in emotional eating at some point. It's a normal behavior. However, for some children, emotional eating can result in disordered eating, feelings of shame or guilt, and/or weight gain.



Emotional eating is a normal response to feelings. When a child uses food to cope with their feelings, it can be a sign that they need additional help.

### Consider the following:

First, think about whether you have used food to cope with your own feelings. Recognizing this behavior in yourself is the first step to helping your child. If this is something that is hard for you, consider reaching out to someone for help, such as a friend, family member, or professional counselor.

### To start the conversation with your child or teen:

- Use yourself as a model to talk about feelings.  
When you feel sad, label the emotion out loud by saying, "I feel sad right now." Doing this normalizes talking about feelings.
- Once you have labeled your feeling, share an age-appropriate, non-food coping technique that you have used to help with that feeling. For example, "Sometimes, when I feel sad, hugs make me feel cared about."
- Avoid talking negatively about using food to deal with feelings.
- Recognize that food WILL usually make your child feel better for a short time after eating. But eating does not solve the problem.
- Help your child create a list of other non-food coping activities.

PHYSICAL HUNGER	EMOTIONAL HUNGER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds slowly</li> <li>• Feel it in your torso (rumbling stomach)</li> <li>• Occurs several hours after a meal</li> <li>• Goes away when full after eating</li> <li>• Eating leads to feelings of satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops suddenly</li> <li>• Feel it in your head</li> <li>• Unrelated to timing of meals or snacks</li> <li>• Does not go away after eating</li> <li>• Eating leads to feelings of guilt and shame</li> </ul>
What to do?	What to do?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eat a snack, including a complex carbohydrate and protein, about 150 calories to 200 calories</li> <li>• Drink a sugar-free drink</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask yourself: How am I feeling? What is going on for me right now?</li> <li>• Acknowledge the feeling and address it</li> </ul>

FOR YOUTH

# Emotional Eating



Bored



Sad



Worried



Happy

## Am I hungry or am I feeling something else?

Many people eat in response to emotions, and this is a normal response. People may eat when they feel bored, when they feel sad, when they feel worried, or even when they feel happy, to celebrate something or reward themselves.

### Did you know?

Research suggests that more than 60% of children eat in response to emotions.



## Things to try:

1. Check in with yourself. Many times we either ignore our feelings or do not even recognize how we are feeling.
2. Once you know how you are feeling, do something to help yourself. If you are feeling sad, talk to a friend or parent/caregiver. If you are feeling stressed, take a break. If you are feeling happy or proud, tell someone about it.

## Practice mindful eating:

- **Get rid of distractions** while eating – no watching screens (i.e., TV, phone, computer, etc.).
- Eat at the **table**.
- **Slow down** eating by chewing slowly, eating with your non-dominant hand, or putting your fork or spoon down between bites.
- **Focus** on your food while eating.
- **Think about the source** of your food – how did your food get to you? Who helped get the food to your plate?
- **Close your eyes** while eating and experience the taste of the food while chewing.
- Use all of your senses to **experience the food** – how does it smell? How does it feel? What does it look like?

## THE EMOTIONAL EATING CYCLE



Source: <https://completeperformancemn.com/emotional-eating-101/>

## Ohio AAP PMP Mobile App

Search Parenting at Meal and Playtime on Apple Store or Google Play



## App Highlights...

- Physician-endorsed materials for parents to access on-demand
- Resources for parents organized by age
- Text reminders sent monthly and/or for age milestones
- Easy sign-up
- Videos on feeding, play, nutrition and more



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