

Research shows that while our behaviors may seem “spur-of-the-moment” when it comes to emotional eating the groundwork is laid several hours in advance by our daily rituals, habits, mindset, and automatic thinking. Emotional eating is simply the last link in a long chain. If you can break the first link, you have a much better chance of never getting to the last link.

The goal of this exercise is to build awareness of what your eating episodes have in common. Maybe it’s a time of day, or a situation, or a type of food, or another person (or being alone), or a feeling – or all of these.

Describe in as much detail as possible what you are experiencing, or remember experiencing, at each stage. Then go back and review. Look for common features. Look at the steps you took.

This helps you build an understanding of the process, which you can then use to disrupt these patterns. For instance, if you habitually stress-eat in your kitchen at 6 pm when stressed, then figure out strategies to deal with a stressy dinner hour before it happens – as far in advance as possible. If you habitually think about certain thoughts beforehand (e.g., “I’m a failure”, “This will make me feel better”, etc.) then come up with ways to respond to those thoughts before they hit you.

Complete this worksheet every time you have an episode of emotional eating. Be honest and thorough. You are collecting data so that you can analyze your own patterns and eventually develop strategies to deal with them.

1. In the 1-2 hours beforehand:

- What are you doing?
- What are you thinking?
- What are you feeling, emotionally? What are you feeling, physically? Where are you?
- What time is it?
- Who’s with you?

2. Immediately beforehand:

- What are you doing?
- What are you thinking?
- What are you feeling, emotionally? What are you feeling, physically? Where are you?
- Who’s with you?

3. In the middle of it:

- What are you doing?

- What are you thinking?
- What are you feeling, emotionally?
- What are you feeling, physically?
- What are you choosing to consume?
- Why are you choosing this particular food(s)? Where are you?
- Who's with you?

4. Afterwards:

- What are you doing?
- What are you thinking?
- What are you feeling, emotionally? What are you feeling, physically? Where are you?
- Who's with you?