

Safe Haven Connect CIC

Understanding Emotional Eating

A Practical Workbook

Version: 1.0

Welcome

Many people eat not only because they are physically hungry, but also in response to emotions. Stress, boredom, loneliness, anxiety, sadness, frustration, or even happiness can influence our relationship with food.

Emotional eating is common and does not mean you lack willpower. Often, it develops as a way of coping with difficult emotions or situations. While eating may provide temporary comfort, it doesn't address the underlying feelings and can sometimes leave us feeling guilty, frustrated, or disappointed.

This workbook will help you understand emotional eating, recognise your personal triggers, and develop healthier ways to respond to difficult emotions while building a more balanced relationship with food.

What You'll Learn

By completing this workbook, you will:

Understand what emotional eating is.

Recognise the difference between emotional and physical hunger.

Identify your personal eating triggers.

Learn healthier ways to cope with emotions.

Create a personalised plan to build a healthier relationship with food.

Before You Begin

This workbook is about understanding yourself—not judging yourself.

There are no "good" or "bad" foods, and there are no perfect eating habits.

Be honest, be curious, and remember that change takes time.

If you have concerns about your eating habits, weight, or health, or think you may have an eating disorder, it's important to speak with a healthcare professional.

Inspirational Quote

> "Food can nourish your body, but understanding your emotions can help nourish your wellbeing."

Module 1 – Understanding Emotional Eating

Emotional eating is eating in response to feelings rather than physical hunger.

For example, you might eat because you are:

Feeling stressed

Feeling anxious

Feeling lonely

Feeling bored

Feeling overwhelmed

Feeling frustrated

Feeling sad

Celebrating something

Seeking comfort

This is a normal experience for many people.

The important thing is learning to recognise when emotions—not hunger—are influencing your eating.

Physical Hunger vs Emotional Hunger

Physical Hunger

Develops gradually.

Your stomach may growl.

You may feel low in energy.

Most foods sound appealing.

You usually stop eating when you're comfortably full.

Emotional Hunger

Often comes on suddenly.

You may crave specific comfort foods.

Eating may feel urgent.

You may continue eating even when you're full.

You may feel guilty or disappointed afterwards.

Recognising the difference can help you make more mindful choices.

Activity 1 – My Eating Habits

Think about the last few times you ate.

Was I physically hungry?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure

What was I feeling beforehand?

☐ Stress

☐ Anxiety

☐ Boredom

☐ Loneliness

☐ Happiness

☐ Frustration

☐ Tiredness

☐ Other:

What did I eat?

How did I feel afterwards?

Reflection

Understanding your eating habits is the first step towards making positive changes. There is no need to criticise yourself—simply becoming more aware of your patterns can help you respond differently in the future.

> "Awareness creates opportunity. Every time you notice a pattern, you give yourself the chance to choose a different path."

Next: Module 2 – Identifying Your Emotional Eating Triggers.

Module 2 – Identifying Your Emotional Eating Triggers

Emotional eating doesn't happen without a reason. It is often a response to emotions, situations, or habits rather than physical hunger.

Understanding your personal triggers can help you pause, reflect, and choose a response that better supports your wellbeing.

Remember, the goal isn't to judge yourself—it's to become more aware.

Common Emotional Eating Triggers

Tick any that apply to you.

- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Boredom
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Tiredness
- ☐ Celebrating
- ☐ Watching television
- ☐ Social situations
- ☐ Seeing certain foods
- ☐ Habit or routine

☐ Other:

Activity – My Personal Triggers

Think about the times you eat when you're not physically hungry.

What usually happens before I eat?

What emotions am I experiencing?

Where am I?

Who am I with?

What foods do I usually choose?

Recognising Patterns

Emotional eating often follows a pattern.

For example:

Emotion → Craving → Eating → Temporary Comfort → Guilt or Frustration

Recognising this cycle can help you interrupt it before it becomes automatic.

Activity – My Emotional Eating Cycle

Trigger

↓

Emotion

↓

Food I usually choose

↓

How I feel afterwards

↓

A healthier response I could try next time

Pause Before You Eat

The next time you reach for food, ask yourself:

Is my stomach physically hungry?

What emotion am I feeling?

What do I really need right now?

Will eating solve this problem?

Is there another way I can care for myself?

Sometimes the answer will still be to eat—and that's okay. The aim is to make a mindful choice.

Reflection

What is my biggest emotional eating trigger?

When am I most likely to eat emotionally?

What is one healthier way I could respond the next time this happens?

Remember

Emotional eating is a coping strategy that many people develop. By understanding your triggers with curiosity rather than criticism, you can begin building healthier habits that support both your emotional and physical wellbeing.

> "Every moment of awareness is an opportunity to choose self-care over self-criticism."

Next: Module 3 – Building Healthier Coping Strategies, where you'll learn practical ways to manage emotions without relying on food alone.

Module 3 – Building Healthier Coping Strategies

Food can provide comfort, enjoyment, and nourishment. However, when food becomes the main way of coping with difficult emotions, it may help to build a wider range of coping strategies.

The goal isn't to stop enjoying food—it's to give yourself more options when emotions become difficult.

Finding What You Really Need

Sometimes what feels like hunger is actually another need.

Ask yourself:

Am I feeling lonely?

Am I stressed?

Am I bored?

Am I tired?

Do I need comfort?

Do I need a break?

Do I need to talk to someone?

Understanding your needs can help you choose the most helpful response.

Healthy Alternatives

Next time you notice emotional hunger, you could try:

- ☐ Go for a short walk
- ☐ Drink a glass of water
- ☐ Have a cup of tea or coffee
- ☐ Practice deep breathing
- ☐ Listen to music
- ☐ Phone or message a friend
- ☐ Read a book
- ☐ Write in a journal
- ☐ Colour or draw
- ☐ Stretch your body
- ☐ Spend time outdoors
- ☐ Take a relaxing bath or shower
- ☐ Practice mindfulness
- ☐ Work on a hobby
- ☐ Rest if you're tired
- ☐ Other:

The 10-Minute Pause

When you feel the urge to eat emotionally, try waiting for 10 minutes.

During those 10 minutes you could:

Take a few slow breaths.

Go into another room.

Drink some water.

Write down how you're feeling.

Ask yourself what you really need.

After 10 minutes, check in with yourself again.

If you're physically hungry, it's okay to eat.

If the urge has reduced, you may have discovered that the emotion needed attention rather than the food.

Activity – My Personal Coping Plan

When I feel...

Stressed

I will:

Lonely

I will:

Bored

I will:

Sad

I will:

Anxious

I will:

Building Self-Compassion

Everyone eats emotionally from time to time.

If it happens, try replacing self-criticism with kindness.

Instead of thinking:

"I've failed again."

Try saying:

"Today was difficult. Tomorrow is another opportunity to care for myself."

Progress comes from learning, not perfection.

Reflection

Which healthy coping strategy would you like to try first?

What usually helps you feel calmer without using food?

What is one small change you can make this week?

Remember

Food can be part of a healthy and enjoyable life. By adding more ways to cope with difficult emotions, you can create a balanced relationship with food and become better equipped to care for both your body and your mind.

> "Every small choice to care for yourself is a step towards a healthier relationship with food and your emotions."

Next: Module 4 – Building a Balanced Relationship with Food, where you'll explore mindful eating, recognising fullness, enjoying food without guilt, and creating sustainable habits for long-term wellbeing.

Module 4 – Building a Balanced Relationship with Food

A balanced relationship with food means giving your body the nourishment it needs while also allowing yourself to enjoy eating without unnecessary guilt or strict rules.

No one eats perfectly all the time. Healthy eating is about consistency, flexibility, and listening to your body's needs.

Practising Mindful Eating

Mindful eating means paying attention to your food and your body's signals instead of eating on autopilot.

Try to:

Eat slowly.

Notice the taste, smell, and texture of your food.

Reduce distractions such as phones or television.

Check in with your hunger before, during, and after eating.

Stop when you feel comfortably satisfied rather than overly full.

Mindful eating can help you enjoy food more and recognise when your body has had enough.

Hunger and Fullness Scale

Before eating, ask yourself where you are on this scale.

Number	How I Feel
1	Extremely hungry
2	Very hungry
3	Hungry
4	Slightly hungry
5	Comfortable
6	Satisfied
7	Full
8	Very full
9	Uncomfortably full
10	Overly full

Many people find it helpful to begin eating around 3–4 and stop around 6–7.

Activity – Mindful Meal Practice

Think about your next meal.

Before eating

How hungry am I?

What emotion am I feeling?

During eating

Am I enjoying the taste?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Am I eating slowly?

☐ Yes

☐ No

After eating

How full do I feel?

How do I feel emotionally?

Letting Go of Food Guilt

Many people label foods as "good" or "bad."

This can sometimes lead to guilt after eating certain foods, making emotional eating more likely.

Instead, try thinking:

All foods can fit into a balanced diet.

One meal doesn't define my health.

I deserve nourishment without guilt.

Every meal is a new opportunity to care for myself.

Creating Healthy Habits

Small habits often make the biggest difference over time.

Consider trying to:

- ☐ Eat regular meals.
- ☐ Stay hydrated.
- ☐ Get enough sleep.
- ☐ Include foods you enjoy.
- ☐ Move your body regularly.
- ☐ Plan meals when possible.
- ☐ Avoid skipping meals if it leads to overeating later.
- ☐ Be patient with yourself.

Reflection

What does a balanced relationship with food mean to you?

Which healthy habit would you like to focus on first?

What is one unhelpful belief about food that you would like to let go of?

Remember

Building a healthier relationship with food is a journey, not a race. There will be days when things feel easier and days when they feel more challenging. What matters most is treating yourself with compassion, learning from each experience, and continuing to move forward.

> "Healthy habits are built one mindful choice at a time."

Next: Module 5 – My Personal Healthy Eating & Wellbeing Plan, where you'll create your own practical plan for recognising triggers, responding to emotions, and maintaining a balanced relationship with food.

Module 5 – My Personal Healthy Eating & Wellbeing Plan

Congratulations on reaching the final module. Throughout this workbook, you've explored the connection between your emotions and eating habits, recognised your personal triggers, and discovered healthier ways to care for yourself.

Remember, there is no such thing as perfect eating. Building a healthier relationship with food is about making small, sustainable changes that support both your physical and emotional wellbeing.

My Emotional Eating Triggers

The emotions or situations that most often lead me to eat are:

- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Boredom
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Tiredness
- ☐ Celebrating

☐ Other:

My Warning Signs

I know emotional eating may be happening when I notice:

☐ Craving specific comfort foods

☐ Eating very quickly

☐ Eating while distracted

☐ Eating when I'm not physically hungry

☐ Feeling guilty after eating

☐ Other:

My Healthy Coping Toolkit

When I notice emotional hunger, I will try:

☐ Go for a walk

☐ Drink water

☐ Practice deep breathing

☐ Call or message someone

☐ Journal my thoughts

☐ Listen to calming music

☐ Read a book

☐ Stretch or exercise

☐ Spend time outdoors

☐ Practice mindfulness

☐ Rest if I'm tired

☐ Other:

My Support Network

People I can talk to when I need support:

Name

Contact

Name

Contact

Name

Contact

Professional support available to me:

My Wellbeing Goals

Over the next month I would like to:

- ☐ Eat more mindfully.
- ☐ Listen to my hunger cues.
- ☐ Reduce emotional eating.
- ☐ Drink more water.
- ☐ Improve my sleep.
- ☐ Exercise more regularly.
- ☐ Reduce stress.
- ☐ Be kinder to myself.
- ☐ Create a regular eating routine.
- ☐ Other:

Weekly Reflection

This week I noticed:

A success I am proud of:

A challenge I experienced:

One thing I learned about myself:

One goal for next week:

My Personal Commitment

I choose to:

- ☐ Care for my body with kindness.
- ☐ Accept that progress takes time.
- ☐ Treat setbacks as learning opportunities.
- ☐ Nourish myself without guilt.
- ☐ Continue building healthy habits one step at a time.

Signed:

Date:

Final Thoughts

Understanding emotional eating is not about restricting food or striving for perfection. It's about becoming more aware of your emotions, recognising your needs, and responding with compassion.

Some days will feel easier than others, and that's completely normal. Every time you pause, reflect, and make a mindful choice, you're strengthening a healthier relationship with food and yourself.

Remember that lasting change comes from patience, consistency, and self-kindness—not from being perfect.

Congratulations!

Well done on completing the Understanding Emotional Eating Workbook.

By working through these activities, you've taken meaningful steps towards understanding your emotions, recognising your eating patterns, and developing healthier coping strategies. Keep returning to this workbook whenever you need support or a reminder of how far you've come.

> "Every mindful choice is an act of self-care. Small steps taken consistently can lead to lasting change."

Disclaimer

This workbook has been created by Safe Haven Connect CIC for educational and self-help purposes only. It is not intended to replace professional medical, nutritional, psychological, or therapeutic advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

If you are concerned about your eating habits, believe you may have an eating disorder, or are struggling with your physical or mental health, please seek support from a qualified healthcare professional.

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About Safe Haven Connect CIC

Safe Haven Connect CIC provides free mental health and wellbeing resources, practical self-help tools, and supportive information to help people improve their wellbeing, build resilience, and access support whenever they need it.

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