



# Lesson 7

START NOW

Harnessing the Power of Mindfulness to Stop Overeating and Emotional Eating and Lose Weight



# Steps to recognize your triggers for emotional eating

Eating is a quick, reliable, effective, cheap, easy way to not feel, switch off, zone out for a while, to **escape from an uncomfortable emotion/feeling** (such as stress, anxiety, boredom, fear of failure or success, loneliness, lack of control, or low self-esteem).

You learned to use food to anesthetize yourself accidentally through trial and error or from someone else (a parent, sibling, friend, or role model).



**It's not your fault; you did the best you could with the knowledge you had.**



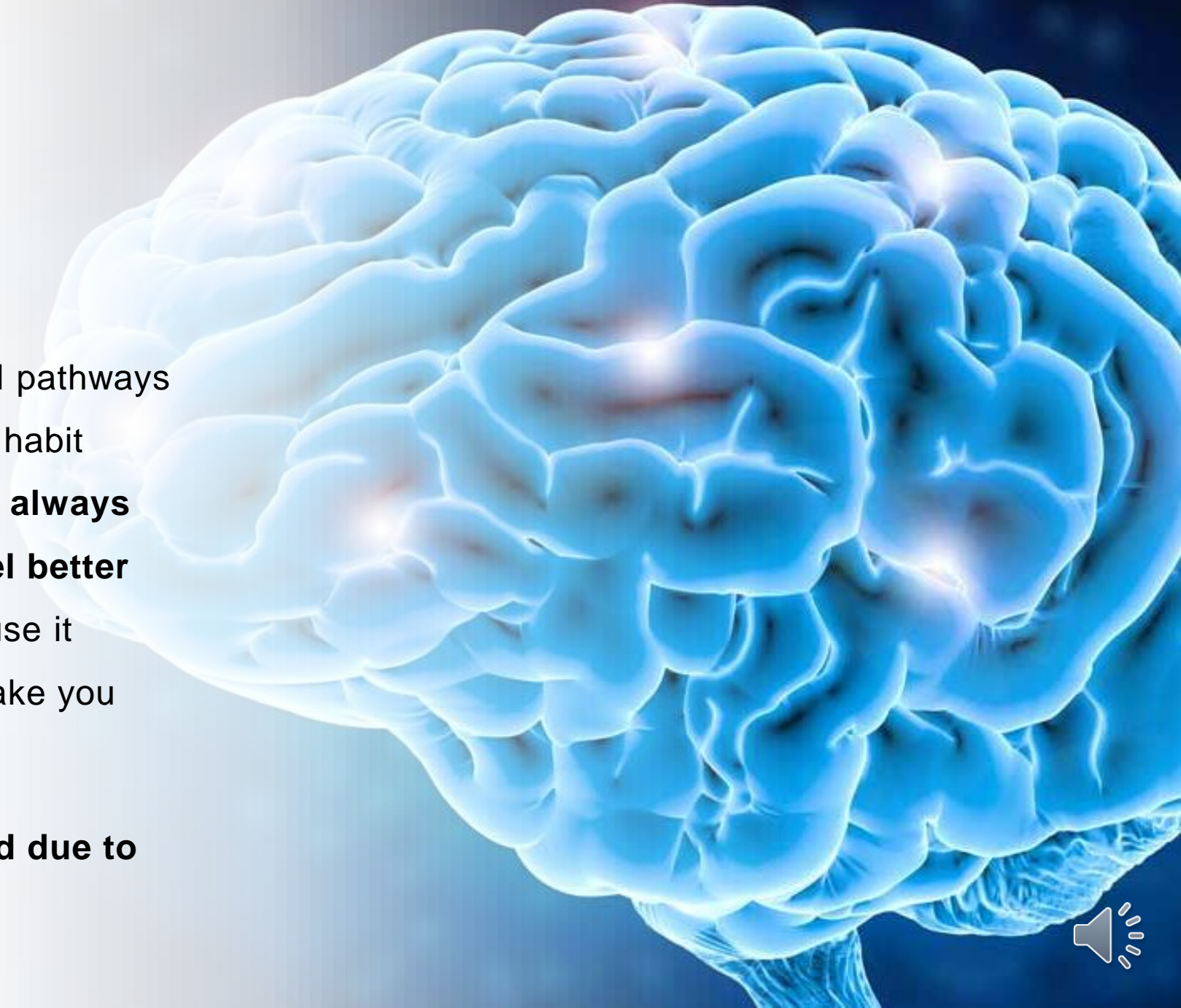
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## Habit formation

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Through repetition, these neurological pathways became very strong and an ingrained habit formed. **Now the unconscious brain always offers this solution to make you feel better when you feel uncomfortable** because it knows that it works and it wants to make you feel good.

**But these pathways can be changed due to neuroplasticity.**



# Your eating issues are not your enemy

Eating issues are the doorway to our real issues that we need to look at. These issues may be relationship, career, parenting, money, love, family, sexuality, or spirituality related, or a combination. The first step is to look behind the door to see what your eating challenges are trying to teach you.

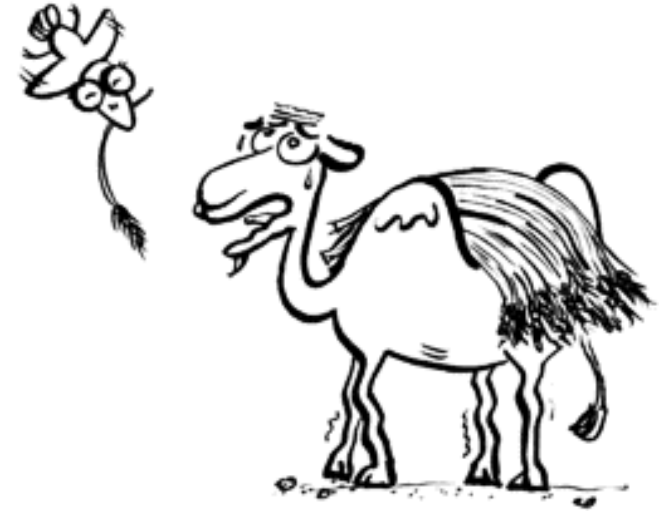
Stop seeing your eating challenge as the enemy. It's quite the opposite; it's your friend, it's an opening. Willingness to walk through that door changes everything.

It will help you become more nourished, happier, and more able to create the life you want.



# Self-awareness exercise

Most of the time overeating is caused by the last straw. **It's been building up for several hours (sometimes even days) in advance by our daily habits, beliefs, self-talk, and automatic thinking.** Then one final, maybe even insignificant, event makes you break down and hit the ice cream box.



The goal of this exercise is to **build awareness of the triggers** of your eating episodes.

Maybe it's a time of day, or a situation, a type of food, a person (or being alone), 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.



## Self-awareness worksheet 1.

What happened 1-2 hours before your overeating episode?	
What were you doing?	
What were you thinking?	
How did you feel emotionally?	
How did you feel physically?	
Where were you?	
What time was it?	
Who was with you?	



## Self-awareness worksheet 2.

What happened immediately before your overeating episode?	
What were you doing?	
What were you thinking?	
How did you feel emotionally?	
How did you feel physically?	
Where were you?	
What time was it?	
Who was with you?	



# Identify your habit

Look at the first row of first 2 tables, “**What were you doing?**”.

Get clear about what you do as a habit. No judgment, no worrying about whether it’s good or bad. Just the facts.

For example:

- I eat after talking with my boss.
- I eat when I’m alone.
- I eat when I’m scared to do something.
- I eat after I yell at my kids.
- I eat when I start to lose weight.
- I eat when I feel like I didn’t do something well enough.
- I eat when I hear bad news.

Take what you have written in the tables and write the facts: what were you doing before eating, what were your triggers and cues? Each fact is just one sentence.



# What created your habit?

What we do, comes from what we are **thinking and feeling**.

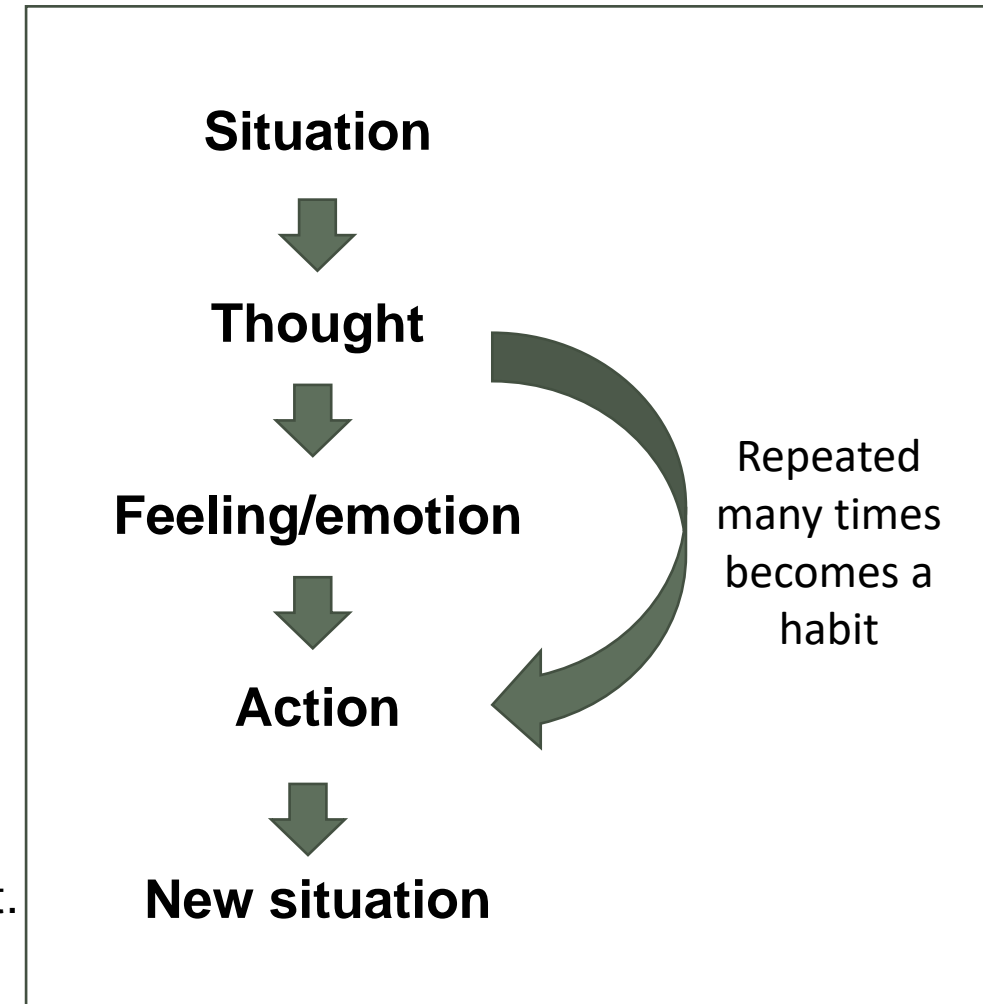
After thinking, feeling and doing certain things repeatedly, they become a habit.

**What happened:** Failed at an exam/your boss told you off.

**What you thought:** I'm a loser, a failure, can't do anything right.

**What you felt:** defeated, disappointed, sad.

**What you did:** you comforted and distracted yourself with eating and watching tv.



# What created your habit?

**What happened:** you called your mum, she asked when you are going to visit her.

**What you thought:** : I should really visit her but I have this important deadline, I need to finish work so I can't.

**What you felt:** guilty.

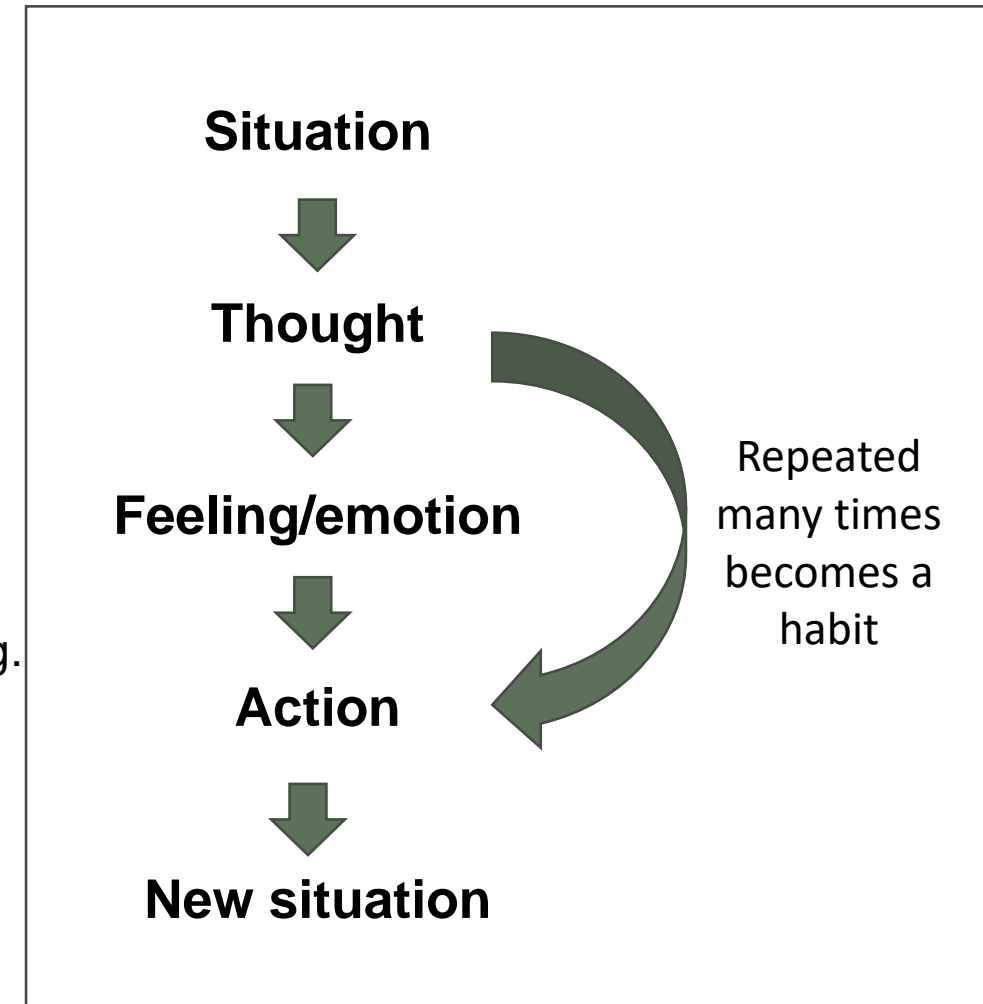
**What you did:** You ate to distract yourself and suppress this feeling.

**What happened:** you sit down to watch tv. Your husband brings a bowl of chips and starts to eat next to you.

**What you thought:** : that looks delicious, I should have some too.

**What you felt:** it's unfair that he can eat chips and you can't. You felt deprived.

**What you did:** You ate to stop feeling deprived.



# What created your habit?

**What happened:** You got home. You felt tired. You went right to the fridge. You grabbed anything and started eating. You're not even sure if you're hungry or not.

**What you thought:** : What a hard day! Finally this is my time!"

**What you felt:** tired and relieved to be home.

**What you did:** Ate to reward yourself for getting through the day.

**What happened:** you finished dinner, cleaning up the kitchen.

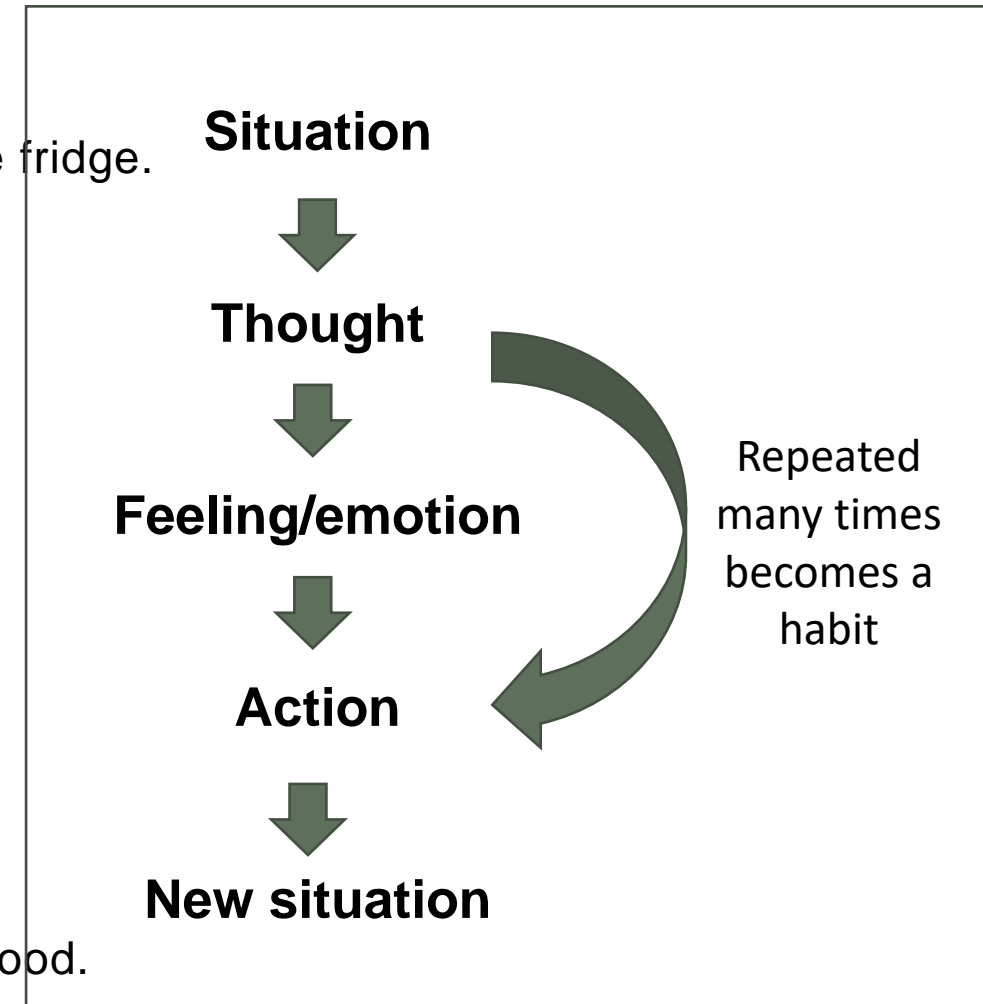
You notice your child's leftover.

**What you thought:** I don't want to waste food. It's perfectly good food.

These few bites won't make a difference.

**What you felt:** Felt uncomfortable because you mother taught you not to waste food. Felt a bit guilty.

**What you did:** You ate the leftover.



# What created your habit?

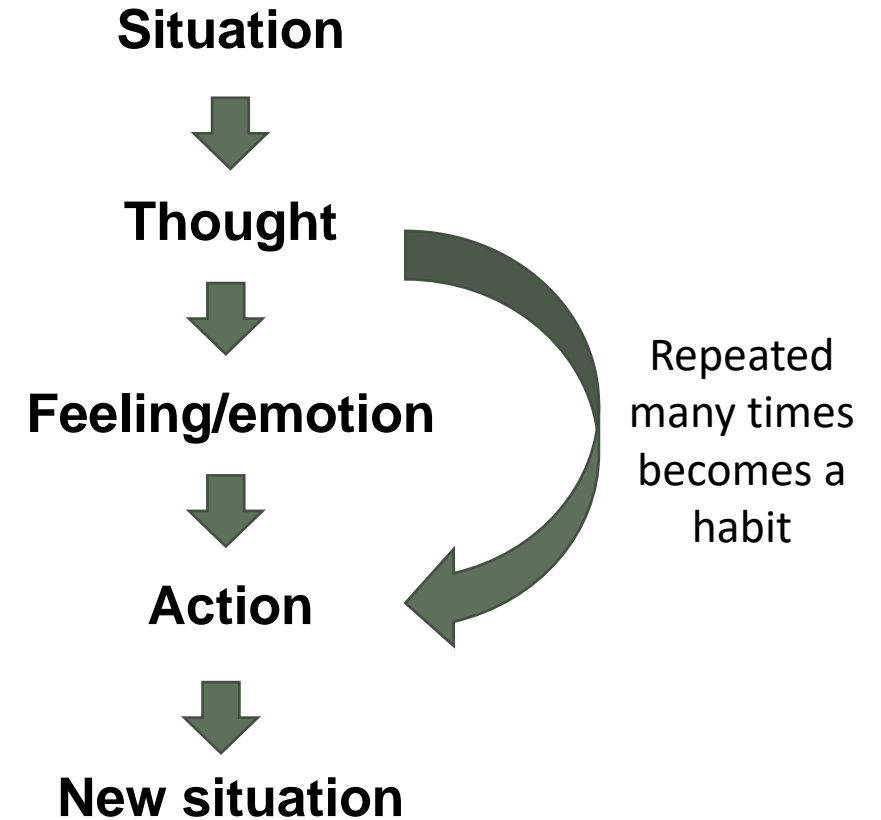
Now it's your turn, based on your completed first 2 tables (before eating) write down:

What happened (cue, trigger):

What you thought:

What you felt:

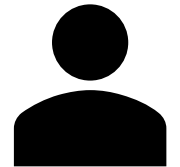
What you did:







# What created your habit?

Your habit can also be triggered by your **environment**.

It might be a **place**, a **time of the day**, or a **person** with you who triggers you to overeat.



Examples:

- When you yell at your **kids** you feel guilty and eat to distract yourself and suppress this feeling. 
- In the **evening** you are tired, and you reward yourself with food. 
- When your **boss** tells you off you feel like failure, and you eat to suppress this feeling and distract yourself. 
- When you go to the **beach** you overeat because you feel like you will never look good in your swimming suit. 

Can you spot a common environmental trigger for your emotional eating habit?



## Self-awareness worksheet 3.

What happened during your overeating episode?	
What were you doing?	
What were you thinking?	
How did you feel emotionally?	
How did you feel physically?	
Where were you?	
What time was it?	
Who was with you?	



# What you think and how you feel during eating?

So far, we looked at what happened and what you thought and felt before you started eating. Now let's have a look what you thought, how you felt emotionally and physically during eating.

Examples:

- **Thoughts:** I'll just eat a few bites, I didn't eat much today, I deserve this, I need to eat this, I can't stop eating, I'll eat less tomorrow, I won't have breakfast tomorrow, I'll exercise more tomorrow.
- **Feelings emotionally:** relieved, calm, zoned out, happy, relaxed, absentminded, out of control.
- **Feelings physically:** enjoying the flavours, satisfied, full, too full, sick.

Write down your thoughts, emotional and physical feelings during eating.

I thought:

Emotionally I felt:

Physically I felt:

Where, when and with whom did this happen:



## Self-awareness worksheet 4.

What happened after your overeating episode?	
What were you doing?	
What were you thinking?	
How did you feel emotionally?	
How did you feel physically?	
Where were you?	
What time was it?	
Who was with you?	



# What you think and how you feel after eating?

Now let's have a look at your thoughts, and how you feel emotionally and physically after eating. Don't judge, try to remain as neutral and compassionate with yourself as possible.

Examples:

- Thoughts: I have overeaten again, and my original problem is still not solved. It wasn't worth eating all that food. I will hate seeing the number on the scale tomorrow.
- Feelings emotionally: out of control, stuck, hopeless, frustrated, and I still feel the same feeling as well that triggered the eating (stressed, tired, sad, lonely, bored). Scared that I will do the same thing tomorrow again. I can't stick to any plan. Disappointed, regretful, guilty. Why am I doing this all the time?
- Feelings physically: too full, bloated, sick, feeling like I gained weight.

Write down your thoughts, emotional and physical feelings after eating.

I thought:

Emotionally I felt:

Physically I felt:

Where, when and with whom did this happen:



# Next steps

You might feel out of control and like you can't stop this habit. But it is only a habit that you created by repeating the same activity. It's like riding a bike now. You don't think about it, you just go through the motions. But habits can be changed, and you will change this habit too. It's absolutely possible.

It is NOT true that once you start down this path, you have to keep going. You can stop at any stage of this process.

- Maybe now you can only stop when you have already eaten too much, but at least you are aware of this habit now, you collected data about it and next time you will think about how you are going to feel after eating.
- Later you might be able to stop during eating and realise what you are doing. It's better to stop during eating even if you have already eaten too much than to think that F\* it and eat as much as you can and start dieting tomorrow or on Monday again.
- Eventually you will be able to stop already before overeating because you are aware of your triggers and cues and you have found solutions to stop this habit.



# Homework

Fill in the tables. Based on your completed tables (**before eating**) write down:

*What happened (cue, trigger):*

*What you thought:*

*What you felt:*

*What you did:*

Can you spot a **common environmental trigger** for your emotional eating habit?

Write down your thoughts, emotional and physical feelings **during eating**.

*I thought:*

*Emotionally I felt:*

*Physically I felt:*

*Where, when and with whom did this happen:*

Write down your thoughts, emotional and physical feelings **after eating**.

*I thought:*

*Emotionally I felt:*

*Physically I felt:*

*Where, when and with whom did this happen:*



# Homework

- Identify your triggers (environment: time, location, people; thoughts and feelings) and start to pay attention to them.
- Try to notice them and stop for a few seconds to think whether or not you can do it differently this time.
- Also, think about the feelings and emotions you feel after eating, before you start eating and evaluate your pleasure and pain you gain with eating.
- What are the outcomes and the consequences?
- You don't need to stop eating at this moment if you can't, don't feel like you have to. At the moment you just collect data. In the next lesson you will learn how to stop emotional eating.

