

Disclaimer:

This eBook was written by Rita May. I am not a doctor or mental health professional and cannot be held liable for the information written here.

This book is meant to provide information about emotional, stress and binge eating. For medical assistance, please seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

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INTRODUCTION

You had a stressful day, it was particularly rough for whatever reason, and even though you had a fairly healthy dinner you find yourself craving a snack as you watch television. You immediately walk to the kitchen, you check out your snack stock in the pantry and you grab cookies, you reach for the chips, and for good measure, you grab a soda.

It was just a bad day, okay, I'm not normally like this. Yet, you repeat this habit. It becomes the norm. You realize you're easily mowing through a pint or two of ice cream every week and you have to buy double the number of chips because they just keep disappearing. You've entered into a vicious cycle of unhealthy eating and it's dragging you down.

As evidenced above, we don't always eat just because we need to satisfy our hunger. We use food as a means to relieve stress, as a reward, for comfort or as entertainment.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

According to the American Psychological Association...

- 43% of women and 32% of men reported overeating or eating unhealthy foods in the past month due to stress
- 33% reported that stress eating helped distract them from their stress
- 1/3 of those surveyed said stress eating is a habit
- 57% of overweight adults surveyed reported frequently engaging in emotional eating.

As you can see, you are not alone. So many people use food to make themselves feel better.

But it's not their fault. It's not your fault if you struggle with food and overeating and your weight no matter how many times and how hard you tried to get this sorted out before.

This pattern developed because it worked.

At some point in your life, eating became a way to cope.

Eating patterns do not exist in isolation. They are expressions of identity, nervous system state, and learned ways of relating to yourself. When those deeper layers change, behavior follows naturally.

But most people don't know about this and we just try to solve our increasing weight problem with diets, overexercising and/or purging the food we ate.

This workbook takes a different approach. Instead of asking you to go on a diet and overpower your hunger signals, it focuses on making overeating as a coping strategy unnecessary. When a behavior is no longer needed for safety or regulation, it naturally loosens its grip.

IDENTITY IS THE REAL FOUNDATION OF CHANGE

Lasting change does not come from managing urges forever. It comes from no longer seeing yourself as someone who must manage them.

Your self-image influences how you interpret urges, how you respond to discomfort, and what you expect from yourself. When your identity shifts, your behaviors follow.

Throughout this workbook, you will be guided to reconnect with parts of yourself that have been overshadowed by coping and survival. It is a gradual, embodied process of becoming someone who relates to food and to themselves from a place of steadiness rather than struggle.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is not meant to be rushed through or consumed in one sitting. It is meant to be worked with.

Each section builds on the previous one. The order matters, not because you need to do everything perfectly, but because your nervous system and self-image need to feel safe enough to evolve.

Approach this workbook with curiosity rather than urgency. Curiosity keeps the nervous system open, urgency activates the very patterns you are here to change.

Change that lasts is rarely dramatic. It is usually quiet, subtle, and cumulative.

You may notice moments of relief, followed by moments of resistance. Both are part of the process. There is no benefit in pushing through discomfort quickly. Stability creates momentum.

Use this workbook in a way that supports integration. Pause when something lands. Repeat exercises when they feel relevant. Let insight settle into experience.

Print it out and write into it or use a separate journal to answer the questions.

ESTABLISHING NEUTRAL GROUND

Before moving on, take a moment to pause.

Place a hand on your chest or abdomen. Take a slow breath in through your nose and let it out gently through your mouth.

Let this statement sink in:

“This pattern developed for a reason. I am not broken. I can change it.”

From this neutral place, change can begin.

PART I — IDENTITY FIRST (THE COMPASS)

YOUR SELF-IMAGE CREATES YOUR LIFE

It took me a while to realize that the real key to gaining back our ability to eat normally again is not setting S.M.A.R.T. goals, or following a diet or exercise plan.

The key is: changing your self-image.

Your self-image is how you identify yourself, how you see yourself, and your thoughts about yourself.

“You can never outperform your own self-image” - Maxwell Maltz

If you identify yourself as a woman with eating issues, you will struggle with eating issues.

If you identify yourself as a woman with weight problems, you will have weight problems.

You cannot extend outside the barriers of your self-image because you immediately self-sabotage yourself to get back into the “box” you created for yourself.

Your self-image is like a thermostat. It keeps you in the range you can identify yourself with.

When I struggled with my weight, I saw myself as a girl with a weight problem (that’s what I saw from most of my female relatives; women struggling with their weight was normal for me).

Later on, when I changed my self-image to being a naturally slim woman, the struggle ended.

As long as you see yourself as someone who is broken, undisciplined, or fundamentally flawed around food, every attempt at change will feel like self-correction. That position keeps the struggle alive.

Identity work begins by stepping out of that position.

FROM BROKEN TO ADAPTIVE

Maybe you also think of yourself as weak, out of control, emotionally dependent on food, or incapable of consistency. Even if you consciously reject these labels, they often sit in the background, shaping how you speak to yourself and what you expect from change.

If you believe something is wrong with you, every strategy becomes an attempt *to fix yourself*. When it doesn't work, the belief that you're flawed feels confirmed. It's like a *self-fulfilling prophecy*.

But let's look at this differently.

At some point, food became a reliable way to regulate emotion, manage stress, create comfort, or provide relief or entertainment. This does not make you dysfunctional. It means you adapted intelligently to what was available at the time.

Nothing is wrong with you. You did the best you could. Your eating pattern served a purpose.

With this shift in perspective, now you see your eating issues as adaptations rather than defects.

You are no longer someone who needs to be corrected. You are someone whose body learned a coping strategy that once made sense.

MAKING PEACE WITH THE STRATEGY

Seeing emotional or binge eating as an adaptation does not mean you have to like it or keep it forever.

It means acknowledging that it plays a role.

Many people try to heal their relationship with food while still being at war with the part of themselves that eats for comfort or relief. That internal conflict creates tension, and tension

keeps the nervous system activated and you'll need food to regulate it. Because this is how your brain is wired at the moment.

Now you recognize that this behavior once helped you survive or cope, while you can also start allowing it to become unnecessary as your ability to regulate yourself, your capacity, grows.

This shift is subtle, but important. It moves you from fighting yourself to leading yourself.

REPOSITIONING YOURSELF IN YOUR FOOD STORY

Identity change begins with a quieter realization:

"I am not my coping mechanisms."

You are the one who developed them.

You are the one who has been living with their consequences.

And you are the one who can outgrow them.

Throughout this workbook, you will be invited to relate to your eating patterns as information rather than something to fix. Information about stress, unmet needs, overload, or emotional pressure.

From this position, curiosity replaces judgment. We'll put our detective hat on and let nonjudgemental curiosity lead us.

MY STORY

I am not writing this from theory alone.

My binge eating journey started in my 20s. Like most girls, I wanted to look attractive so started to undereat and overexercise to lose weight.

Then, at university, the added pressure and stress of preparing for exams weakened my willpower and I had to give in to my body's demand for food. It felt good and it calmed me down too. And so a 7-year long cycle of bingeing and restricting started.

When I felt worried, stressed, sad, or angry I turned to food and I stuffed myself. Then I purged, dieted, and overexercised to compensate. After repeating this pattern frequently, it became a habit. A seemingly uncontrollable habit. It started to affect many areas of my life, and I knew I had to stop doing it somehow.

The problem was that I did not yet have a stable sense of who I was and I tried to be the good girl and please everyone. I was constantly seeking external validation.

Then I made changes in my personal life and did a lot of inner work to discover who I was under all the people pleasing and who I really wanted to be. These changes attracted positive things into my life which then made binge eating irrelevant. I didn't need it anymore to be able to cope.

Later I also learned a about nutrition (obtained a Nutrition and Diet Advisor and a Health Coach certificates) and started to concentrate on becoming a healthy person instead of being thin and my body wasn't demanding nutrients (in the form of cravings) anymore.

I share this not to compare experiences, but to normalize the process you are in. What you are going through is human, patterned, and changeable.

WHO ARE YOU WITHOUT THE STRUGGLE?

Before moving on, pause for a moment.

Reflect on this question:

“Who am I when I stop defining myself by this struggle?”

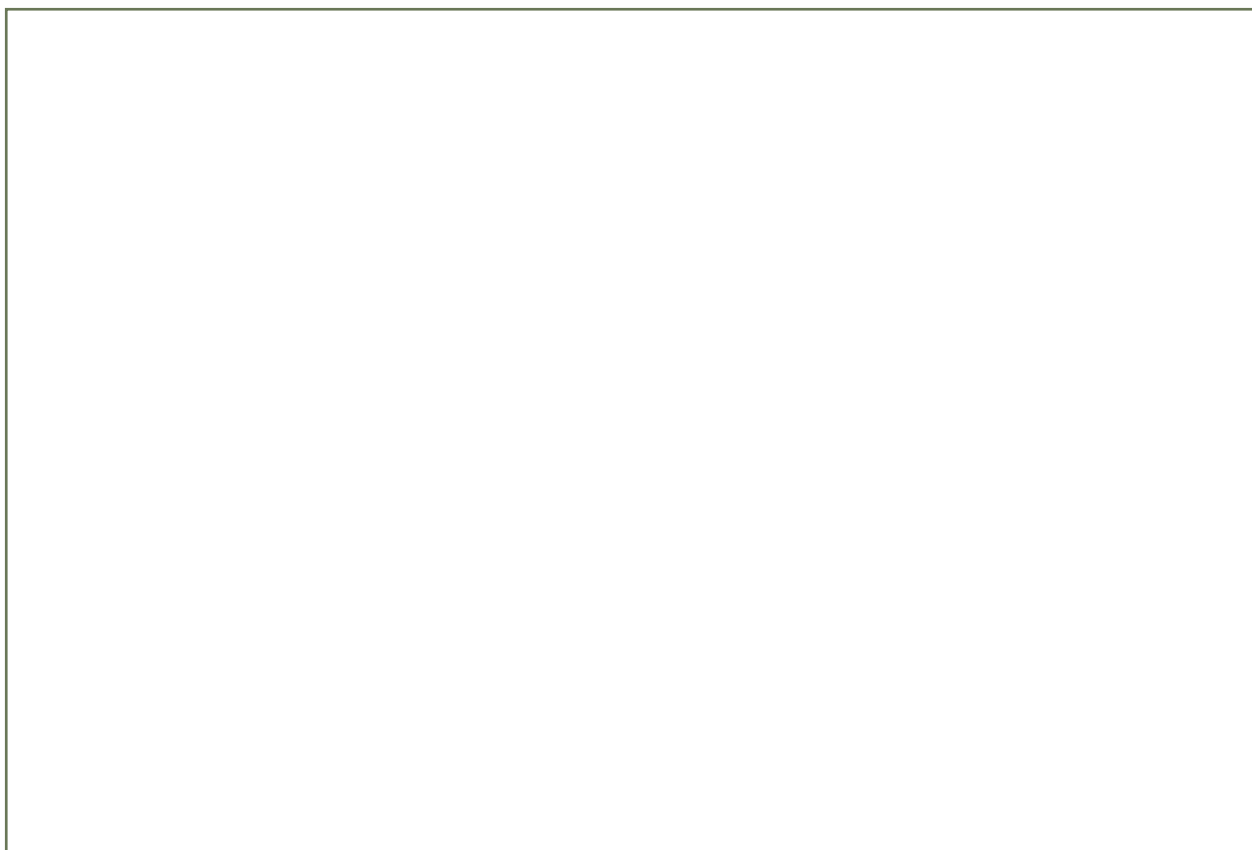
If you want to live a different life, you have to find the real YOU under all the conditioning you covered it up with.

Your self-image is either holding you back or driving you forward into the life you would love to have.

Use your imagination to dream up the woman you want to be and become her or be her again.

Imagine that one morning you wake up and you suddenly realize that Fairy Godmother visited you at night and turned you into the future YOU that you want to become (maybe a normal eater, a healthy, fit you).

How would you know that this happened? What would be the first thing you notice that's different? What would she do, how would she feel? If she looks in the mirror what would she see? How would she spend the day? How would she behave in certain situations, what would her daily habits be, what would she eat, what would she wear, who would she spend time with, what would she do for fun, how would she communicate with others, how would others treat her, what standards and boundaries would she have, what would her job be, where would she live? Imagine her in great detail!

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their detailed imagination of the future woman.

Write about this future you.

It doesn't matter if you can't answer these questions, yet. But think about them often.

As you'll progress through this workbook the picture will become clearer. We'll also return to it to check how its evolving.

In the next part of the workbook, we will begin to look at the overeating pattern itself, to understand how it operates, observe and learn from it.

PART II — UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERN

This part of the workbook helps you see why the overeating pattern has been so persistent.

Many people approach emotional or binge eating as an isolated problem. They focus on diets, foods, or moments of loss of control.

But the pattern is larger than that.

It is supported by cultural messaging, physiological stress responses, and years of conditioning around restriction, discipline, and self-control. When these forces combine, the system naturally loops back to the same behaviors, even with strong intentions in place.

Understanding this system is not about assigning blame. It is about removing confusion.

WHY DIETING REINFORCES THE PATTERN

Most people who struggle with emotional or binge eating have dieted repeatedly.

Up to 95 percent of diets fail in the long-term. But it's hard to accept this, so we keep telling ourselves that with enough willpower, enough endurance, and enough hard work, we can succeed. As long as we stick to the plan, we'll lose the weight and keep it off, and finally be happy.

You follow the diet religiously, you don't eat the "forbidden" foods, you exercise every day, you follow the plan. You suppress your hunger signals and you push through.

Your "primitive" brain (the oldest part of the brain) freaks out. It senses a shortage in food/nutrient supply so it starts to send you intense hunger signals and increases your appetite to get more food. It also slows your metabolism down so you don't use that much energy. It does all this to keep you alive and healthy. It doesn't know that your "thinking" brain (neocortex) decided to put you on a diet.

However, as a result, you are extremely hungry all the time, battle with uncontrollable cravings and when you can't bear it anymore, you binge.

Then you diet even harder because now you have extra weight to lose due to your binges, but consequently, you binge even harder. And this can go on like this for years and years while you slowly gain weight even though most of the time you are hungry and you are on a diet.

Dieting teaches the body and brain that food is scarce, regulated, or conditional. Even when a diet is framed as healthy or flexible, the underlying message is often the same: certain foods, amounts, or body states are only acceptable if control is maintained.

This creates internal pressure and stress in your body.

Physiologically, restriction increases food focus, heightens reward sensitivity, and lowers tolerance for stress.

Psychologically, it strengthens the belief that eating must be managed carefully to prevent failure.

When stress, fatigue, or emotions enter the picture, the brain and nervous system naturally seeks relief. The more food has been restricted or moralized, the stronger that pull becomes.

Often the most disciplined and motivated people struggle with food the most because they can stick to their restrictive diets the longest. They deplete their bodies the most, which leads to the biggest and most uncontrollable binges.

This is why letting go of dieting is necessary to step out of the restrict-binge loop.

STRESS, WEIGHT, AND THE ROLE OF PLEASURE

Research shows that our thoughts, emotions, feelings, beliefs, stress, relaxation, pleasure, and awareness all affect how we metabolize the food we eat.

Acute, short-term stress decreases appetite. However, when stress persists (chronic stress), a hormone called cortisol is released. Cortisol increases hunger due to the imbalance of ghrelin, leptin, and insulin hormones, leading to overeating.

Numerous studies show that cortisol also affects food preferences, i.e. increases cravings for foods high in sugar or fat, or both. As a response to eating these 'comfort foods' dopamine is released, which increases a feeling of well-being. Dopamine is the substance that makes many things (e.g. watching a good film, sex, nicotine, drugs, and food) pleasurable.

Next time you feel stressed, your body will remember that these foods made you (temporarily) feel better or at least less bad so you will feel a strong craving for them.

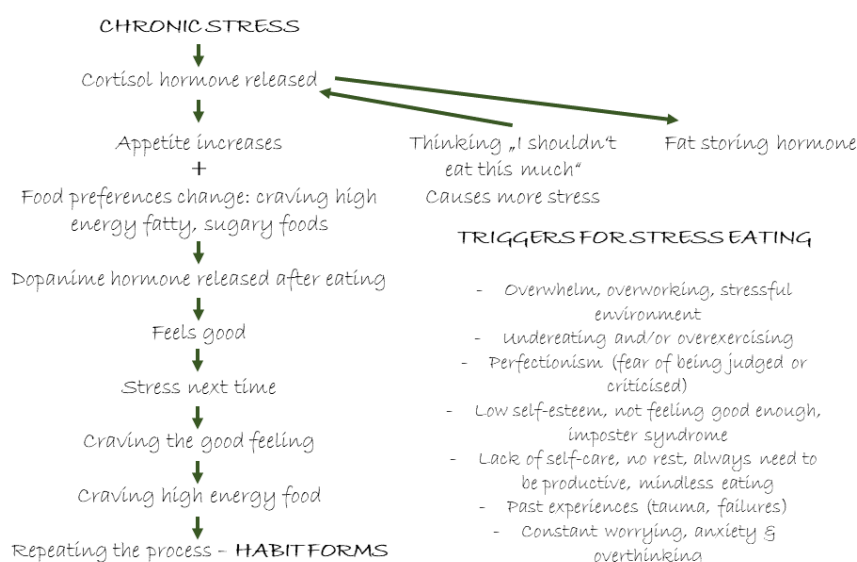
After several repetitions of this stress-eating response, the corresponding neural pathway becomes strong, and the process becomes an automatic habit. When you feel stressed and overworked, you have an insatiable craving. Often you find yourself eating without being consciously aware of what you're doing.

The good news is these neural pathways can be weakened due to neuroplasticity and the habit can be stopped.

While it's commonly believed that stress is related to work, relationships, financial and parenting issues and conflicts, many more triggers are causing stress-related overeating.

- Overwhelm (too much to do), overworking, stressful environment.
- Undereating and over-exercising are also stressful for the body.
- Perfectionist mindset. Trying to do everything perfectly so no one can judge or criticise us.
- Low self-esteem, not feeling good enough, imposter syndrome.
- Lack of self-care and rest leads to using food as "me-time" or as a way of procrastinating.

- Always wanting to be productive leads to mindless eating.
- Past negative experiences (trauma or failures).
- Constant worrying, anxiety, overthinking.



For example, if you stress too much about eating perfectly otherwise you gain weight, you cause yourself a lot of unnecessary anxiety about food and you are unable to enjoy the experience of eating anymore.

This self-induced stress also increases your cortisol level. When we're stressed, the brain needs to focus on survival. Therefore, it activates the functions needed for fight or flight (the muscles) and deactivate digestion and the pleasure seeking part of the brain.

So when we eat in a stressed state, we not only impair our digestion, causing all kinds of digestive problems including bloating, but we also deprive ourselves of the pleasure we would get from the food.

This means we need to eat more to get the same amount of pleasure as we would've from eating in a relaxed state. When we eat in a relaxed state our digestion and metabolism becomes better too.

So now you understand why a stressful life may make you gain weight. You are stressed and overworked all day. You don't have time to eat much during the day and even if you eat you do it fast and you get very little pleasure from it, if any. In the evening you go home ravenous and you eat really fast to curb your hunger. However, you did not get the pleasure you were looking for so you keep eating the whole evening to release the stress you felt all day and to feel the pleasure your brain is seeking at the end of the day.

In the meantime, you might also be thinking that you shouldn't be eating this much and this makes you anxious, which increases cortisol and again lowers the amount of pleasure you gain from the food.

This creates the self-fulfilling prophecy of eating too much, the very thing you were anxious about. Crazy, right?

Probably you are also the go-to person at work, always pleasing everyone, dieting, and exercising to look good, but you don't take the time to relax and enjoy life. That's a waste of time, right? You feel guilty when you are not productive or you take time for yourself. You need to do something even during eating.

Overeating is the breaking point when your body can't take any more restrictions and the stress caused by these restrictions.

Pleasure, or rather the lack of it, plays an important role in forming the overeating habit. When we don't get enough pleasure from other areas of our life, we compensate for the missing joy with eating. Food may end up being our main source of happiness.

Genuine pleasure helps signal safety to the nervous system. Without it, stress accumulates.

In the next part of the workbook, we will begin to focus on safety and regulation.

PART III NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION

For many people, expressing difficult emotions or admitting they have “negative” feelings like sadness or anger feel difficult or even impossible. We just put a mask on and pretend that everything is fine.

It’s understandable that we don’t want to feel anxious or hurt, or upset. It’s uncomfortable, right?

So we choose to suppress these feelings and comfort or numb ourselves with food when these feelings come up. The stuffed feeling and the guilt are also unpleasant, but at least that’s something we’re used to now. And we can also distract ourselves from our real problems with planning our next diet to compensate for the overeating.

And the most significant reason we do this is that we’re afraid to feel our emotions.

WHY ARE WE AFRAID TO FEEL OUR FEELINGS?

For many of us the reason is that we were taught that these feelings are simply not acceptable.

A common mindset in our society is that you should just be strong and get over it. Don’t be so emotional!

Emotions are often seen as a sign of weakness. We have been taught to suppress our feelings.

Especially women. If a man is angry he is simply angry. If a woman is angry, she is a “bitch” or “hysterical”. When a man is sad, he is just sad. When a woman is sad, she is “being emotional” and “hormonal”.

So we suppress our emotions because we don’t want to be seen as emotional or weak.

But when you try to resist a feeling is like keeping a beach ball underwater.

You can keep it down for a while, but then you get tired and the beach ball “explodes” above water.

The same happens with your suppressed feelings too.

After a while, they “explode” and the experience is much more uncomfortable than it would’ve been if you let yourself feel them.

As we always suppress our emotions, we only experience this intense feeling when they explode.

And when you don’t have much practice at handling intense emotions, even just a small expression of them can feel terrifying. You may feel like you’ll suddenly fall apart and not be able to recover.

So, you just end up stuffing it down with food.

IGNORING OUR FEELINGS DOESN’T MAKE THEM GO AWAY

But ignoring our feelings doesn’t make them go away. Instead, they’ll linger, unprocessed and misunderstood, and eventually, they’ll affect your mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

Many people can’t stop eating their feelings because they’re scared if they let themselves feel their emotions that feeling will stick with them for a long time.

But once you start feeling your feelings, you’ll experience that all feelings are temporary.

Neurologists found that emotions last only 90 seconds. The chemicals causing you to feel a certain emotion are flushed out of the system in ~90 seconds.

If you let the feeling just wash over you without acting on it, without feeding them with thoughts, especially catastrophizing thoughts, it will go away after a few minutes. It’s possible to sit with a feeling and watch it disappear after a while. It needs some practice but you can do it!

Feelings come in waves. They build up to a peak when they are most intense, and then they subside. It’s the same with your “positive”, pleasant feelings too. Have you ever been constantly happy or relaxed? Even during a happy, relaxed holiday, something can happen

that shifts your mood. Your kids start to argue, it starts to rain, you lose something, or you don't like the food you ordered in a restaurant.

The waves of different emotions rise and fall all day long. They are all temporary.

Some feelings, like grief, heartbreak, and stress appear persistently but they are also temporary. They also have a peak, and then a less intense phase. It's completely safe to just let them wash over you and let them subside.

Neuroscientist, Dr Candace, describes emotions as *energy in motion*. I like this description because it nicely demonstrate that we can just let them flow through us. We need to let them flow through us, otherwise they get trapped in the body and can cause all kinds of problems.

If we live in fear of our emotions, they have too much power and control over everything we do.

So we want to stop doing this, right?

REGULATION BEFORE URGES

Many binge eating help approaches jump directly to urge management. They teach you what to do when the urge to overeat appears, how to distract yourself, or how to talk yourself out of it.

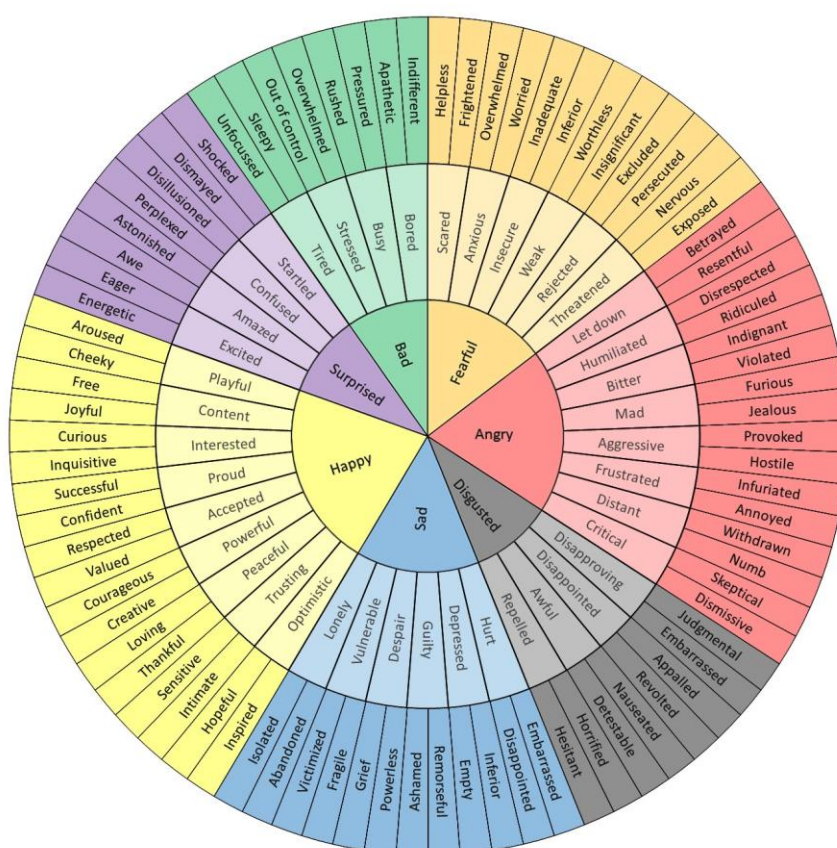
But it's much harder to cope with your emotions and regulate your nervous system when you're already in a heightened emotional state. That's why we practice regulation before it's needed.

By building familiarity with calming and stabilizing states, you teach your nervous system that relief is available without urgency.

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Most women are not even aware of how often they swallow their emotions until they are forced to not do it anymore. So I want you to regularly check in with yourself.

If you can't identify your feelings use the Feelings Wheel. (From <https://feelingswheel.com/>)

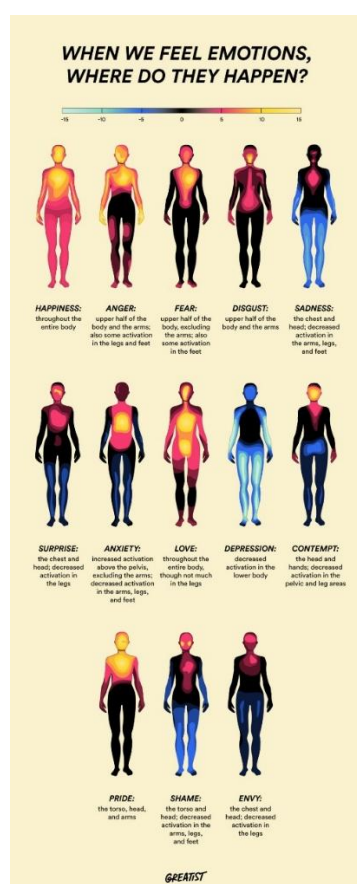


Several times a day check in with your feelings and **say to yourself: I feel, and that's ok.** Set a times for a few times a day to do this quick check in with yourself. Maybe once in the morning, midday, midafternoon, in the evening and at night.

It may feel silly and awkward at first, but this acknowledgment of your feelings will really help you stop suppressing your feelings with food. And it's easy to practice anywhere and anytime.

Don't judge your feelings. All emotions provide value to your life. Accept them and just let them be.

Let the emotions wash through you. Notice what you feel in your body, where do you feel the discomfort? Is it a tightness in your chest or throat, buzzing in your head, heaviness in your feet? Notice how you feel and let yourself feel those feelings without trying to changing them or judging them.



EMOTIONAL AGILITY

Emotional agility is having the tools and ability to regulate or let go of emotions. This is a crucial skill.

There is no universal regulation technique that works for everyone.

What matters is not the technique itself, but whether it helps your body move toward steadiness.

This may include (they can be combined):

- *Gentle movement* (yoga, walking, leisurely swimming)
- *Breath awareness and breathing exercises* (square pattern 5-5-5-5 or 4-7-8 pattern)
- *Butterfly hug*: wrap your arms around yourself, so that each hand touches the opposite upper arm or shoulder. Then move your hands like the wings of a butterfly, to tap your arms/shoulders in an alternating rhythm (as an alternative, you might just tap your knees if you want/need to hide what you're doing).
- *Self-havening*: similar to butterfly hug but you stroke your arms instead of tapping.
- *Massage*: self-massage of your hands with a lotion, massage of your body using a foam roller or massage gun or a massage by someone else. (Muscle tension is actually your nervous system screaming for help.)
- *Tea ritual*: (creating a ritual of boiling the water, steeping the tea while maybe doing some of the other techniques from the list, and drinking the tea slowly).
- *Look at something soothing*: photo of your family, your favourite place or holiday, candle light, plants, freshly cut flowers or trees outside, a beautiful painting, an inspirational quote or mantra framed.
- *Visualize a happy memory*, a favourite place or your favourite colour.
- *Visualize breathing in positive feelings* and the negative energy leaving your body at every exhale.
- Visualize putting all your negative uncomfortable feelings into a balloon and let it fly away.
- Visualise putting your negative feelings on a leaf and see as a stream takes it away.
- Imagine wrapping a *blanket of love* around you.

- *Journaling*: for example “brain dumping”, writing for 10 minutes about anything that comes to your mind without stopping or editing.

Choose a few regulating exercises from the [Self-Soothing Techniques toolkit](#). There are 45 techniques on the list so that you can find something you feel drawn to.

Familiarity is more important than variety. Practice them when you are relatively calm. This is how the nervous system learns and your body will remember these practices when you need to regulate your emotions.

The purpose of these practices is not to eliminate discomfort. It is to create enough stability that discomfort does not immediately trigger a need to escape.

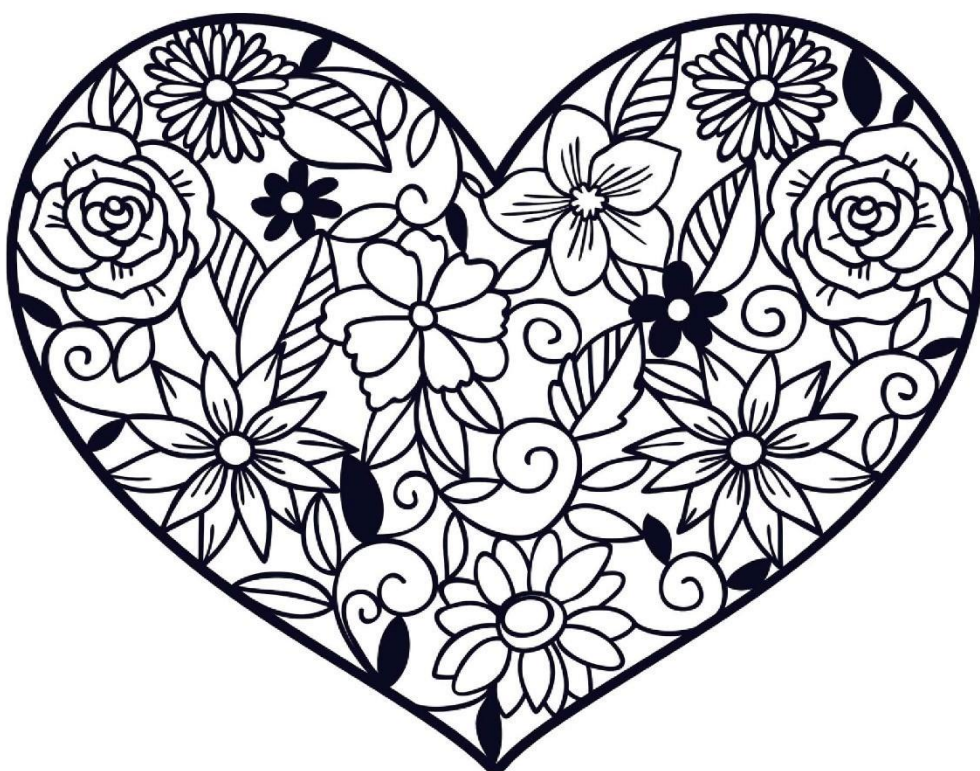
MEDITATE

Meditation is so beneficial for us. As you begin to regularly practice meditation, the effects will become stronger and your ability to achieve a sense of calm will become easier. The most advanced meditators can actually go into their mind and find calm amidst in the most stressful and chaotic environments.

Much like riding a bike or learning a sport, you have to devote necessary time to the practice of meditation in order to get the most benefits from the practice.

Meditations will also help you stop emotional eating because a calm mind can deal with emotions much better than a stressed mind.

Choose a few meditations that you are going to try. Try mediation apps like Calm or Headspace, have a look on YouTube or try my [Feeling Your Feelings meditation](#).



PART IV HOW TO STOP EMOTIONAL AND BINGE EATING

Urges to overeat or binge are often the most confusing and distressing part of the eating pattern.

They can feel sudden, intense, and out of proportion to what is happening in the moment. Many people describe them as automatic, almost hijacking the body before there is time to think.

By the time an urge appears, the nervous system is already activated. That's why we practiced regulation first. They created the conditions that allow this method to work.

NEUROBIOLOGY OF URGES TO EAT

Let's see what happens in your brain when you develop an overeating or bingeing pattern.

As I explained in Part II, every time you binge because of dieting or to cope with your emotions, the responsible neurological pathways become stronger and faster, consequently, your urges get stronger and more unbearable too. The only way to feel better now is by giving in, which in turn further strengthens the habit.

But don't worry, *neurological pathways can be changed due to neuroplasticity*.

If you don't give in to your urges, the responsible pathways will get weaker and weaker. Think about a small path in a meadow. If you use it often, it gets wider and more visible. But if you stop using it, the grass takes it back. It's similar with the neurological pathways too.

Important note: You need to eat enough food to be able to dismiss urges. If you are starving, your survival instinct will overpower you, and for good reason. You shouldn't dismiss that urge. Please also read the chapter about how to eat to stop binge urges.

HOW TO DISMISS YOUR URGES TO BINGE OR OVEREAT

An urge is a combination of thoughts, body sensations, and emotional energy.

It often includes:

- A sense of pressure or restlessness in the body
- Repetitive, convincing thoughts
- A feeling that action is required now

But urges are not commands.

They start with thoughts and images coming from your “primitive” brain. These thoughts generate strong emotions and physical sensations in your body but they’re only thoughts. They cannot do anything to you.

Let me prove to you how powerful your thoughts are.

Think about a huge dog chasing you. It’s barking and running after you. You run as fast as you can but the dog is getting closer. You reach the end of the road and there is nowhere to go. There is a huge brick wall in front of you. You can’t get over it, the wild dog is right behind you reaching for your leg

If you imagined this scenario vividly, your heart rate probably went up. Or imagine watching a horror or a romantic movie. They change how you feel even though you’re just sitting there, doing nothing.

Nothing happens to you physically, only thoughts and images (imagined or on TV) create the physical and emotional changes in your body. You do the same to yourself with your thoughts and created images when you have an urge to binge or overeat. You imagine the food, you see yourself eating, and your thoughts urge you to eat.

But you have a calm, wise state inside you, where you can always go back when the mind settles down. Think about it like the clear blue sky that is always there above the clouds.

When you have an urge, and all those images and thoughts about eating are racing in your mind, it's like the weather. Your thoughts are like the clouds, the rain, the wind, or sometimes even like a huge storm. But sooner or later the weather calms down and goes back to the clear blue sky. Even during the biggest storm, the clear blue sky is always above the clouds.

So when an urge comes, the best thing to do is to let the weather do its thing, and simply wait for the clear blue sky to appear, i.e. wait for the mind, emotions and bodily sensations to settle down. Don't jump in to try to change the weather, you can't. It will suck you in, spin you around, and you get soaked. Just look at the weather from the outside and wait for the clear blue sky to appear.

Let your thoughts and feelings come and go and just observe them as you were watching a film or listening to someone else's conversation. Don't get involved.

Not all of your thoughts are your thoughts. You picked some of them up somewhere at some point in your life and your mind keeps bringing them up.

Some thoughts feel unimportant and you don't pay much attention to them. For example: "What time is it?" "What was that noise?" "Her hair looks nice." You don't hang on to these thoughts, they just come, and you let them go.

But other thoughts feel really significant and we take them very seriously, such as: "Why didn't he call me yet? He doesn't love me." "I could eat that whole thing." "I can't stop eating." You keep repeating these thoughts, you keep them tight and don't let them go.

Then, when you act on these thoughts, you strengthen the habit and these thoughts will come up more frequently and will generate stronger emotional responses. If you could just let them come and go like you do with your unimportant thoughts, they wouldn't make you feel the way you feel.

You don't have to take your thoughts so seriously. You can accept them or let them go. It's your decision. And if you decide to let them go, as you will with your urge

thoughts, you don't really need to manage or change them. After a while, these thoughts will leave you and new thoughts will come, as they always do.

You don't need any willpower to fight them. You don't need to fight them at all. All you need to do is letting them go. Dismissing an urge using willpower is like standing in a big, raging river and trying to do yoga. It will be extremely difficult, even impossible. But if you get out of the river, you can do yoga on the shore easily while watching the raging river from a safe place.

As we can't control the river, we also can't control our thoughts and emotions, but we don't need to. If you just wait, you will see your thoughts and emotions washed away and replaced by new and your experience will change.

Each time you stay present without forcing an outcome, you teach your system that urgency does not always require action.

This builds trust. If you can do it once, you'll have more confidence in yourself that you can do it again and again.

6-STEP BLUEPRINT

When your mind, your thoughts are revved up (during an urge), you cannot think clearly, you are in an "unintelligent state". You probably said to someone something you didn't mean to when you were furious. When you are very angry your mind is also revved up and in an unintelligent state. Your calm, clear blue sky state is wise and intelligent. Your goal is to get back to this state.

The steps are:

- 1 Notice if it's physical or emotional hunger
2. Distance yourself from the food
3. Set a timer
4. Allow the experience to exist (regulation)

5. Decision and response

6. Giving yourself what you really need

These steps are not meant to be followed rigidly. They describe a flow rather than a rule.

You can use all 6 steps or only a few at a time. You may move through them out of order.

When you are in the middle of a binge eating episode you may only be able to use Steps 3 & 4 and that's ok.

Don't worry, it's fine. Just take baby steps and you will get there.

Downward spiral of emotional eating



Upward spiral of emotional eating



STEP 1 PHYSICAL OR EMOTIONAL HUNGER

Before you start eating ask yourself: Am I

really hungry? Physically hungry?

To help decide, I included this list to be able to distinguish between physical and emotional hunger.

For more detailed comparison consult the

[*Physical and Emotional Hunger Cheat Sheet.*](#)

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EMOTIONAL & PHYSICAL HUNGER

EMOTIONAL HUNGER	PHYSICAL HUNGER
• Strikes suddenly • Urgent & overwhelming • Craving for specific comfort foods • It's a craving we can't get out of our head • It isn't over when the stomach is full • Eating triggers negative emotions (guilt, powerlessness, shame)	• Becomes stronger gradually • It can wait • Anything sounds good, including healthy foods • Felt in the stomach (growling, pang) • Stops when the stomach is full • Eating is satisfying, positive emotions

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- If you are physically hungry eat a nutritious meal.
- If you are emotionally hungry continue with the following 5 steps:

STEP 2 DISTANCE

If possible, step away from the food for a few minutes. If you are in the kitchen, go to another room. If you are in a restaurant, and you are full but can't stop eating, go to the bathroom.

STEP 3 DELAY

Set your timer for 10 minutes and don't eat during that time. If you still want to eat after 10 minutes, you can, no problem at all. But during this time practice the nervous system regulating, self-soothing exercises from Part III to manage your emotions, recognise the voice of the lower brain, the habitual urge thoughts and try to switch to the thinking brain and the "clear blue sky" state, where you don't need food anymore to escape.

If you are already in the middle of a binge eating episode just try to slow down. Taking a big breath between bites can help to get out of your unconscious urge state to the conscious thinking, "clear blue sky" state.

You might not be able to stop eating, and that's okay. Right now, how much you eat isn't as important as getting back into a more mindful state instead of the unconscious, mindless eating state. You will get there!

STEP 4 NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION AND ACCESSING THE THINKING BRAIN

Take a few deep breaths to slow down your racing mind.

Most people need to calm their body down first because it's overwhelmed by the physical sensations. Try one or more of the nervous system regulating exercises you practiced in Part III from the [*Self-Soothing Techniques guide*](#).

Choose a few that worked well, write them on a piece of paper you always keep with you or in the Notes app in your phone so you can easily access them when needed because you won't remember them when the thinking brain is not available. Since you have been practicing these exercises even when you didn't have the urge to eat, your brain and body are familiar with them and will access them easily.

If it feels challenging, hug yourself (or use the Butterfly Hug or Havening techniques) and talk to yourself like you would to someone you love. What would you tell your child or someone else you love if they felt this way? How would you comfort them? Tell that to yourself.

For example:

- "This is just a temporary feeling. I've felt this before and it passed."
- "I have amazing coping skills. I can do this!"

Remember, the aim is to calm the nervous system down, get out of the fight or flight response and get back to the intelligent, thinking state, the clear blue sky state.

SWITCHING TO THE THINKING BRAIN

If you can't access your thinking brain, try any of these pattern interruptions:

- Breathing exercises o Square pattern (5-5-5-5) o 4-7-8 pattern
- Mental exercises (Solving a math problem, Counting backwards)
- 5 senses mindfulness exercise (Notice 5 things you see, touch 4 things, hear 3 things, smell 2 things and taste 1 thing or notice what you're tasting now)
- Say a mantra, affirmation, or your favorite poem or a song lyrics.

It also helps to get back to the intelligent, thinking, conscious brain if you say your thoughts out loud and add to the beginning: "My revved up brain is telling me....." or I'm thinking that....".

You can also call this part of your brain the lower brain, primitive brain, or survival brain. Some call it the lizard or reptilian brain. Call it whatever you like.

For example:

- My revved up brain is telling me to eat because I deserve it, I had a bad day.
- My revved-up brain is telling me that I will eat less and exercise more tomorrow so I can eat a lot today.
- My revved-up brain is telling me that I already messed up so might as well continue eating.

This is Awareness. Now you realize what's happening, who's voice is that in your head.

STEP 5 AWARENESS

Your survival brain will make you fear the change of the habit (bingeing).

Everything unfamiliar is registered as a danger in your brain until the opposite is proven. The brain likes the familiar because that's already proven to be safe. It will make change (e.g. feeling your feelings without numbing with food) look scary and unfamiliar.

It will try to convince you that it's safer to remain the same, that you can make up for the overeating tomorrow with extra exercise and a strict diet. It will try to convince you that feeling your emotions instead of numbing them with eating is dangerous, and it will try to persuade you to stick to the familiar and just eat. Just eat!

But you just keep using the nervous system regulating exercises instead and repeat a mantra over and over again.

The lower brain sounds extremely convincing because it uses thoughts, sentences that worked before. You acted on those thoughts before. You may still feel tempted to believe them and act on them.

But now you are aware of these thoughts, you have caught yourself heading in the direction of bingeing, you regulated your emotions and you can use your thinking brain.

The next step is to stop and think about what's going on. Now you can decide whether these thoughts are true or not, whether you truly need more food, or **whether eating/bingeing will later make you feel even worse than the urge feels now.** Will eating lead to happiness, self-pride, and self-respect, or self-criticism, a feeling of failure, and low self-esteem?

Now you are in the conscious state of decision making.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Were these thoughts helpful in the past?
- What is the outcome of overeating/bingeing? How am I going to feel physically and emotionally after eating? How about the next morning?
- Is it going to take me closer to my goals or not?
- Is it going to nourish me?
- Who do I want to be in this situation (my old self or my future self who has no food issues)?

When you simply react to a trigger as you used to do, you are behaving like you have done in your past and you'll strengthen the old neuropathways in your brain and therefore, enforce your overeating habit.

When you respond to the trigger as the future you, who you want to be, you deliberately build and strengthen new neuropathways, and create a new habit and a new reality.

Dissociate – look at yourself from the outside as if you were another person, preferably a person who loves or cares for you. “Get out of your body”, look at your body eating and ask the following questions:

- What is this woman (you) doing?
- Why is she doing that?
- What else could she do?/What does she really need?

This leads us to the next step.

STEP 6 GIVE YOURSELF WHAT YOU REALLY NEED

Ask yourself: What are you emotionally hungry for? Do you want to relax, rest, or do you want excitement, movement, love, or pleasure? Think about it. How could you give that to yourself without eating?

This could be anything: talk with someone, go outside for a few minutes, do a few jumping jacks, drink a herbal tea (warm drinks are soothing and calming), pick up a book, watch a funny or sad video, cry if you feel like it or shout, punch a pillow. Release that pent up energy (remember, emotion is energy in motion) if needed to.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

What are you going to do?

The decision is in your hands.

Decide whether you are going to eat or do something else and get on with your day.

If you don't feel like eating anymore, that's great.

If you still want to eat, that's totally fine too. Don't worry, over time you will decide more and more often not to eat. Be patient with yourself. Don't beat yourself up if you decided to eat, it's ok. Instead, enjoy the meal you decided to eat thoroughly.

If you can, put a portion on a plate, try to eat it slowly, mindfully, and enjoy, really savor every single bite. Try not to stuff yourself mindlessly.

It's completely fine if you can't do it right now and you eat quickly and mindlessly to feel better.

What matters is how you relate to yourself afterward. Reflection without judgment allows learning, while judgment reinforces the cycle.

Each experience adds information and over time, this information accumulates into change. You don't need to rush the process. Try to go without food a bit longer each time.

Moving forward let's make a plan for the future.



PART V STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

When you are calm and have no urges to overeat, sit down, and prepare yourself for future episodes.

Use the **Self-Awareness Exercise** later in this chapter and the [Food and Lifestyle Journal](#) to find your triggers and reasons for emotional eating and think about how you could disrupt these patterns. In the Journal you can track your food, sleep, feelings, hunger signals, and many more things that will all help you identify the reasons for overeating. Discovering the reasons for your overeating habit can help you be prepared to stop the bingeing before it starts.

Eating struggles are an entry point to the deeper things asking for your attention. They often point to unresolved areas in your life: relationships, work, parenting, finances, love, family dynamics, sexuality, spirituality, or a mix of these. When you're willing to look beyond the surface, you can discover what your eating patterns are actually trying to show you.

TYPICAL REASONS FOR OVEREATING

Here are some typical reasons for overeating.

PERFECTIONIST MINDSET

You ate something that you didn't want to/"shouldn't" and you feel like you might as well eat whatever else you didn't let yourself eat before because your diet is ruined anyway. You will start your diet perfectly tomorrow. This is a very common reason for binge eating and overeating.

If you eat something you didn't want to, just simply move on. Your day is not ruined, it's doesn't make a big difference.

If you start eating everything else, that will "ruin your day" much more. Dieting and restricting food or overexercising tomorrow will just set you up for more bingeing in the future (as I explained before).

PHYSICAL REASONS

Constant physical hunger can also trigger binge eating and overeating so make sure you look out for the following habits making you hungry:

- **Not drinking enough water** Being thirsty is a very similar feeling to hunger. Make sure you drink enough water every day. If you think it's a problem for you, track how much water you drink. You should aim to drink about two liters/day.
- **Not sleeping enough** Lack of sleep causes irritability, lack of focus, and hormonal imbalance. If you haven't had enough sleep your ghrelin level will increase (this gives the hunger signal) and your leptin level will decrease (this gives the "I had enough food" signal), making you feel hungrier than usual. You should aim to sleep 7-8 hours/day.
- **Chronic stress** Chronic stress causes physical and emotional hunger. The reason for physical hunger is the imbalance of ghrelin, leptin, and insulin hormones again. (I explained stress eating in PART II.)
- **Too restrictive diet; not eating enough** This is straightforward. Besides making you feel hungry, eating too little slows down your metabolism, which means you will need to eat even less in the future to keep the weight down. (I also explained stress eating in PART II.)
- **Grazing all day long** This becomes a habit and means that you will be hungry frequently because your body expects food. It also results in too much insulin secretion. Eat three balanced meals and 1 or 2 balanced snacks between meals if you are physically hungry.
- **Unbalanced meals** Eating lots of 'naked carbs' (meals containing mainly carbohydrates) will put you on the blood sugar roller coaster and you'll be hungry and will crave food all the time. Balance the carbs with fibre (vegetables and fruits), protein and healthy fats.
- **Too much processed foods** Additives and too much sugar can mess up your hunger signals. The more you eat these processed foods the more you crave them. This is simple chemistry, it's not your fault. The food industry

spends a lot of money developing these foods to make you buy more of their products. Their researchers combine additives, fat, white flour, salt, or sugar to make these addictive foods. Make sure you eat mostly whole foods and occasionally or in small amounts the processed foods you love.

- **Low nutrient diet** The body is hungry for micronutrients (vitamins and minerals). Make sure you eat whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, protein and complex carbohydrates every day and at most meals.
- **Mindless eating** If you eat too fast, or in a distracted or zoned out way, your brain doesn't have time to register your hunger signals, so you will not realize when you're full. Try to eat slowly and mindfully.
- **Some medications increase hunger** Some antihistamines, blood pressure medicine, diabetes medicine, antidepressants, and steroids may increase hunger too.
- **Candida overgrowth** This can make you crave sugar.

HABITUAL EATING

- You had to clean your plate when you were a child and it became a habit.
- Your parents, grandparents comforted or rewarded you with food, or you always celebrated with food so you crave food for comfort, or reward or to celebrate.
- When you got home from school you always had something sweet (e.g. cookies) for a snack. Now every time you get home from work you crave something sweet.
- You "need to" eat something when you watch TV. It's a habit you developed.
- You snack on the ingredients while you cook. This is also a habit.

HEDONIC OVEREATING

The food is so tasty you don't want to stop eating it. It is fine to overeat on special occasions when the food is so delicious you don't want to stop. However, if you do

it all the time and it leads to weight gain that you are unhappy with you need to diversify your join. You need to find other activities that give you pleasure other than food.

EMOTIONAL REASONS

These are typical reasons for emotional eating.

FILLING A LACK WITH EATING

- Lack of love,
- lack of attention,
- lack of self-worth, self-confidence
- loneliness,
- boredom, monotony (lack of excitement, goals, passion),
- lack of sleep,
- lack of coping mechanisms (stress, nervousness, anxiety, worry).

ANGRY EATING

- You need to chew on something constantly because you can't say something that you want to.
- You always need to eat something after an argument or fight to release the pressure.
- When you are stressed, you crave food, you want to chew something.

FEAR OF CHANGE

These are subconscious thoughts that make you overeat or binge.

- I can't eat my favorite foods anymore because I need to lose weight. (So you restrict these foods and then binge on them later.)
- I won't be able to keep the weight off and people will laugh at me. (It's better to not try to lose weight at all so I won't fail again.)
- People will treat me differently when I'm slimmer (my overweight friends will not like me anymore, the opposite sex will be interested in me).

- I will have to finally find a partner, I won't have the excuse of being "too fat and nobody likes me" anymore.
- I can't suppress my bad feelings with binge eating, I will have to face my feelings, problems and will have to find a solution for them.
- I will not have the excuse "I'll do it when I get thin" available for me anymore.
- Sometimes women try to protect themselves from a past (sexual) trauma by growing a "protecting" fat layer, so men wouldn't see them desirable anymore.

Research shows that if you crave soft, creamy, comforting foods (cakes, ice cream, peanut butter), most likely you eat to fill a lack in your life. However, if you crave crunchy food, such as chips, peanuts, cookies, pretzels, you eat from anger or to suppress something you would want to say.

SELF-AWARENESS EXERCISE

In most cases, emotional eating is the final tipping point. Tension has been accumulating for hours, sometimes days, through everyday habits, beliefs, inner dialogue, and unconscious thought patterns. Then one last, often minor, trigger is enough to push you over the edge and into the ice cream carton.

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, your negative self-talk, 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.

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?

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?

What happened during your overeating episode?

What were you doing?

What were you thinking?

What were you feeling,
emotionally?

What were you feeling,
physically?

Where were you?

What time was it?

Who was with you?

What happened after your overeating episode?

What were you doing?

What were you thinking?

What were you feeling,
emotionally?

What were you feeling,
physically?

Where were you?

What time was it?

Who was with you?

Complete this worksheet every time you have an episode of binge eating or emotional eating. Be honest and thorough. You are collecting data so that you can analyze your own patterns.

As you gradually increase your self-awareness (be patient with yourself, it will take time), you will recognize the triggering thoughts, places, situations or person and

will be able to stop a few minutes before eating to do the 6-step process I described in the previous chapter.

You will also see that you probably felt less bad before overeating than after it. You can remind yourself of these horrible thoughts, emotional and physical feelings you experience after bingeing next time you want to overeat.

Take time this week to really pay attention to your habits and triggers. Pause before you start eating and breathe in and out six times. Try the 5-5-5-5 breathing exercise mid-binge or before you start to eat. Breathe in for 5 seconds, hold it for 5 seconds, breathe out for 5 seconds and hold for 5 seconds.

Start to notice the habits and triggers that set off your “hunger button”. Then do the 6-step process to dismiss the urge to eat. Do this often enough and you won’t need to employ any willpower to eat less, just awareness.

Once you find your emotional triggers and/or physical reasons for overeating, list them here.

List possible steps to take, or specific activities you will do, when you feel the urge to overeat or you know you are in a triggering environment, with triggering company, or around triggering food. Use the nervous system regulating, self-soothing exercises, say out loud what your revved up brain tells you to do, stop and

think if it's true or not. You want to wait for different thoughts that are bringing you closer to your goals. Maybe you also need to concentrate on your negative consequences of overeating. Maybe you want to temporarily avoid the triggering foods, people and situations until you can confidently dismiss your urges. You want to stop listening to your inner critic and be mindful about the words you are using. Don't worry if you can't come up with many ideas at the moment. The next chapters will help you release the need for food as an emotional crutch even more.



ADOPT NEW HABITS

It's easier to give up a negative but pleasurable habit if we replace it with a positive, pleasurable habit. When we give up a habit, our brain automatically starts to search for another activity that can provide the same or similar feelings. That's why smokers put on a bit of weight when they stop smoking. They find the missing pleasure in eating. **So it is very important to choose a new habit wisely.**

The results of an experiment with drug addicts clearly demonstrate this. The addicts were in prison and they were divided into three groups. The members of the first group gave up drugs because of an outside force, in other words, they did

not have any inner motivation. This group started to use drugs again as soon as the force stopped, i.e. when they left the prison.

The second group really wanted to stop using drugs; they had an inner motivation. They managed to keep away from drugs for a relatively long period of time, some as long as 2 years. They only fell back into using drugs when they got into a stressful situation. The reason for this is that they did not find a replacement behavioral pattern that would have helped them to relieve the stress.

The third group had a new, positive habit to replace the old habit and give them the pleasure they felt from the drugs. Some of them found their happiness in a relationship, others in spirituality, and some of them in a career that they were passionate about. Most of the members of this group were able to give up drugs forever. However, some of them fell back into using drugs after about 8 years because they didn't do the next step.

Each time you manage to dismiss an urge to overeat give yourself some kind of reward, reinforcing that the new habit gives you pleasure. Don't wait with the reward until you haven't had a binge for months. You should already celebrate if you managed to stop for just 2 minutes before your binge to observe your thoughts. Or if you managed to take a few breaths during the binge to slow down. Reward, celebrate every single time when you managed to stop mid-binge.

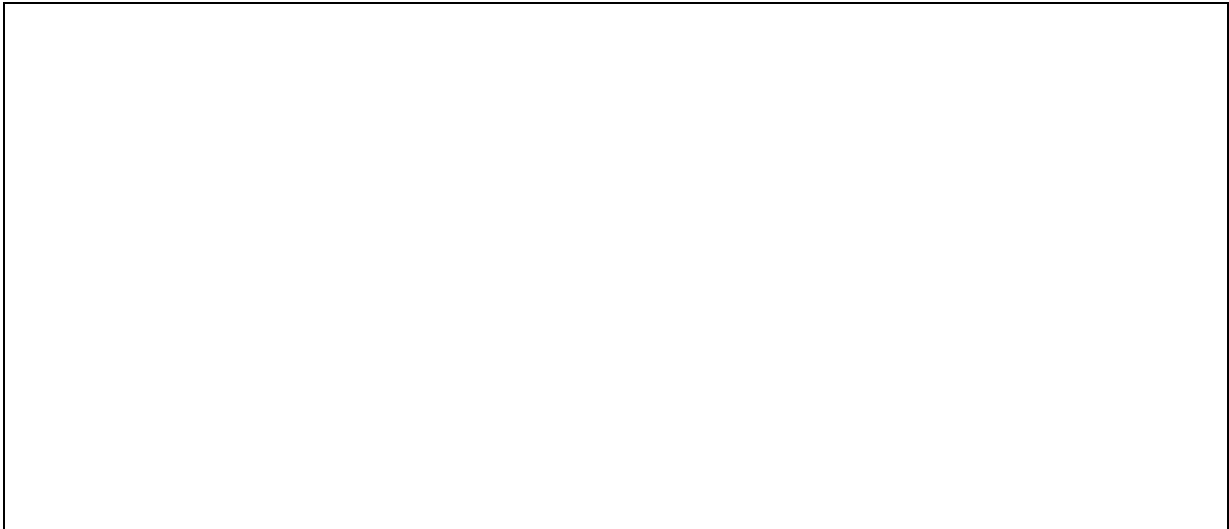
I want you to know that you can stop any time!!! You don't need to eat until it's painful just because you have started to binge. Celebrate even if you managed to eat just two bites less than you would've normally eaten.

You need to reward the smallest results. The reward should come immediately after the positive action, not later.

What makes a good rewards? Of course, the reward shouldn't be a slice of cake, but something that is not related to eating. For most of us praise is enough. You can also get ideas from video games, where the game rewards the players with points, medals, gifts or moving up the high score list.

You can also collect coins or stones in a jar and when it's full, buy yourself a present.

How are you going to reward yourself?



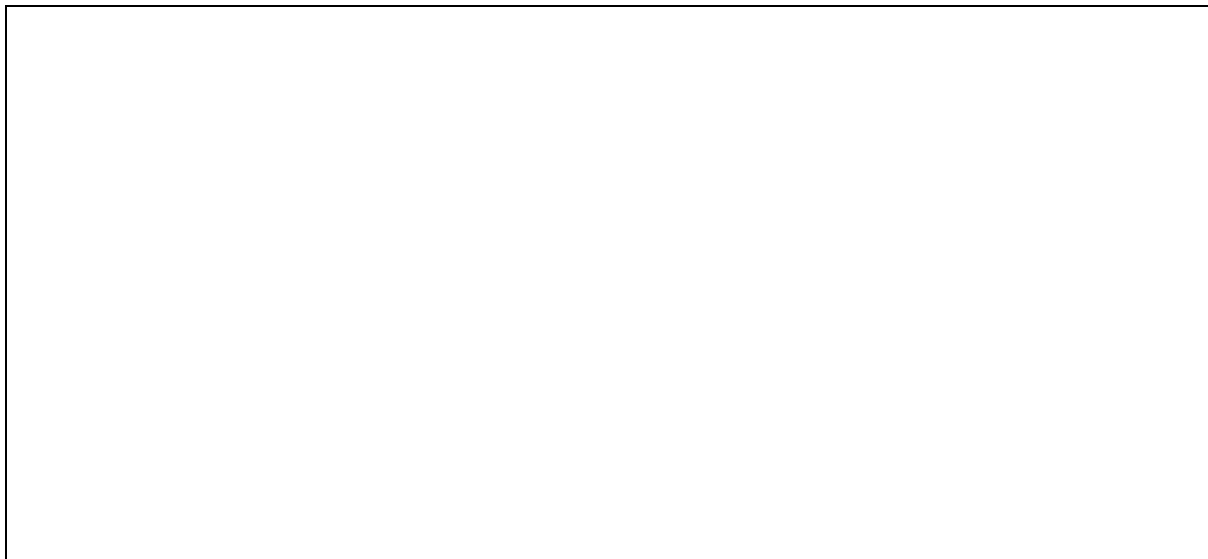
Introduce self-care routines to prevent emotional eating triggered by stress, overwhelm or tiredness

For example sleep routine, rest and relaxation exercises, nervous system regulation, exercise, meditation, writing down 3 things you did well at the end of the day, or writing down 3 things you are grateful for at the beginning of the day. You will find more examples in the next chapters too. **How are you going to take better care of yourself? What are you going to implement?**

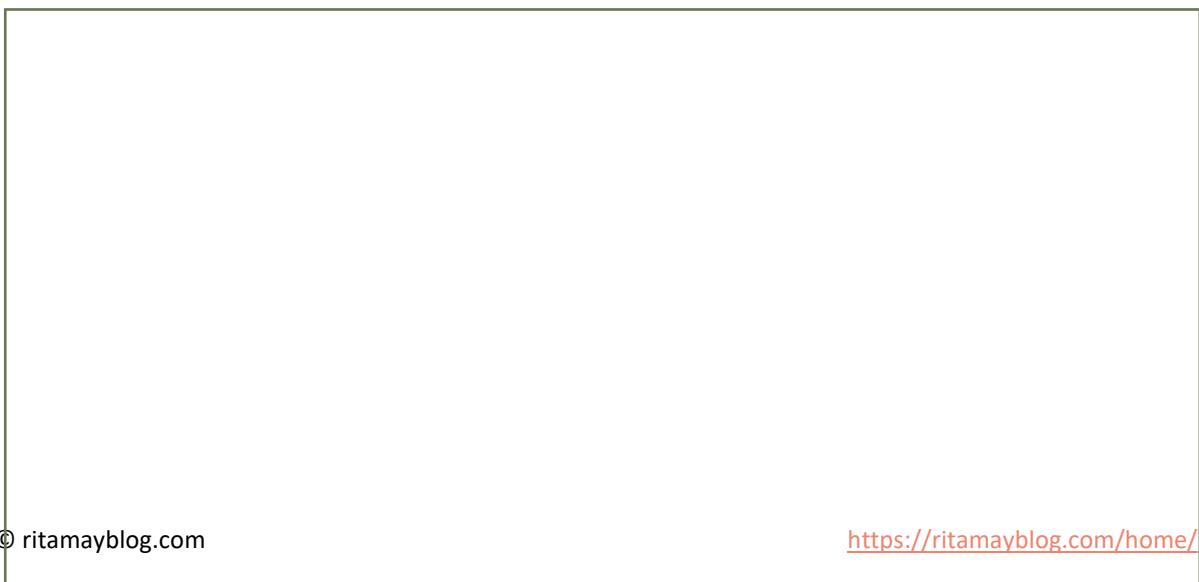


Improve your diet and lifestyle if you overeat due to constant physical hunger

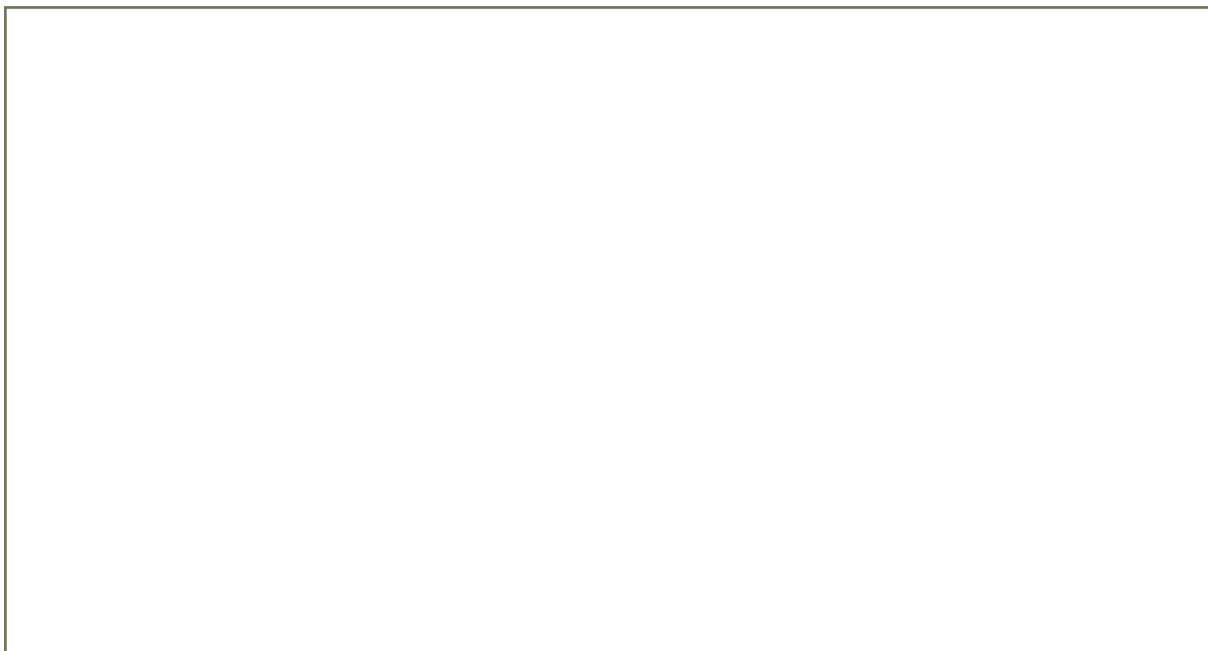
For example drink enough water, try to eat slower and more mindfully, do not follow a very restrictive diet, eat enough, give up dieting and eat balanced, nutritious meals so your body is not starving, eat your favorite but not so nutritious food in moderation too (we crave what we can't have, so reassure yourself that you CAN eat anything you want), and read the side effects of your medications. (More on this in PART X.)

What are you going to implement?

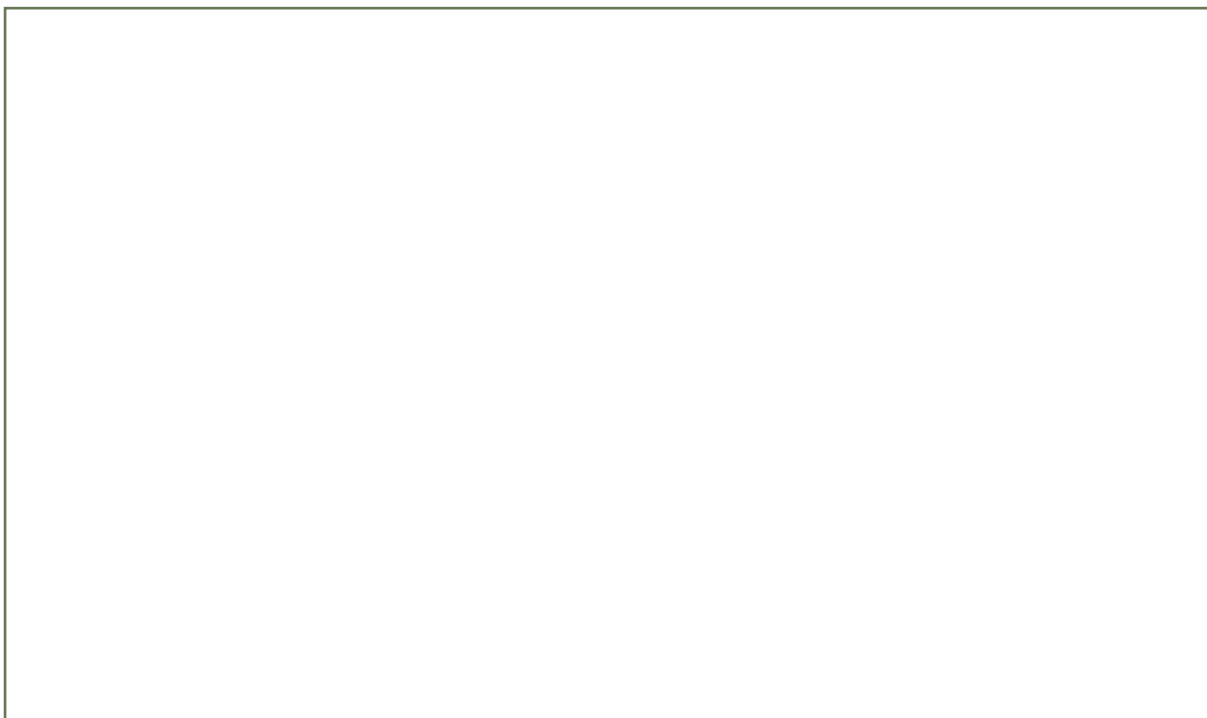
When I feel anxious or stressed, instead of eating I can find ways to relax and reduce the anxious and stressful feelings. More specifically I will.....

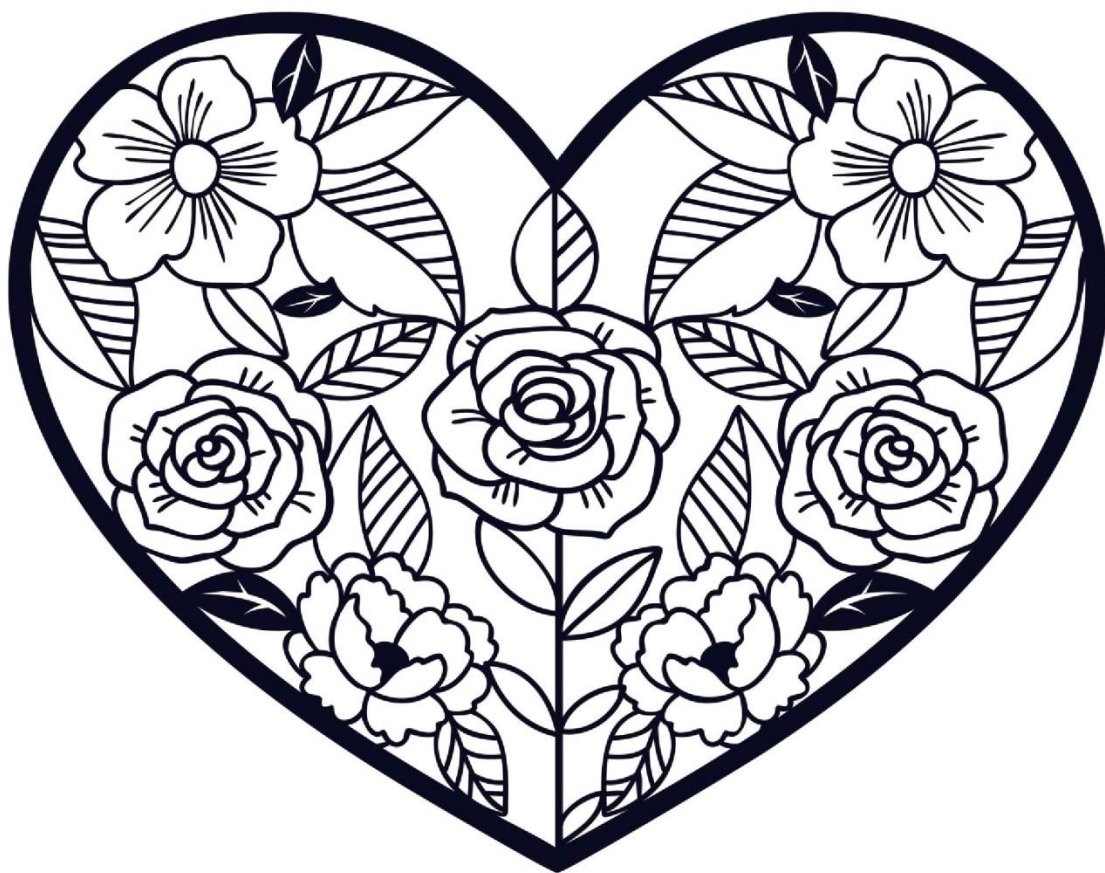


To deal with feelings of loneliness, I can...

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the prompt above.

When I am feeling tired or worn out I need to go to bed earlier and create better boundaries. To do this I will...

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the prompt above.



PART VI SELF-LOVE

“You are allowed to be both a masterpiece and a work in progress, simultaneously.” – Sophia Bush

ADDICTION TO DIETING RESULTS IN SELF-HATRED

We live in a world that’s obsessed with how we look. We see people with perfect body and life (neither of them real in most cases) on TV, in magazines, and on social media. All these media sources and in some cases, family members, friends, classmates, and colleagues make us feel that if we have some extra weight it means we are “less than” or we simply don’t have willpower.

Women start to doubt themselves, their self-esteem drops, and the obsession with thinness damages their self-confidence. They may feel ashamed because they don’t look like their idolized celebrities or their skinny friends.

This starts at a young age and many young girls start crazy, restrictive diets that they read about on social media. Probably it’s something that their favorite celebrity or their friend used to lose weight. These fad diets are usually not sustainable and lead to bingeing or overeating. It might result in years of struggling with food and body image.

They start to wonder if something is actually wrong with them. Clearly, only someone who has something wrong with them can have these eating issues. Also, they feel like they have an awful problem with their eating that they need to hate and attack. So they start to fight themselves, their appetite, their weight, their body fat.

They fight their eating problems and the constant negative self-talk in their head. They hear from themselves over and over that they are not good enough, they always fail, they can’t stick to any plan, they are not loveable. They make themselves miserable without any sustainable results to show for it.

They expect this approach to work because this is the only way they know.

As Regena Thomashauer, aka “Mama Gena” says: “Today, even still, most of the beauty industry is owned by men and most of the advertising agencies they hire are owned by men and most of the senior creative directors within those advertising agencies are men. And all of these fellas get richer when women feel insecure about their bodies, when we believe we’re unlovable as we are, when we believe we’d be more worthy if it weren’t for the cellulite or the stretch marks or the grey in our hair. Sisters, it’s a lie of our culture. And I know you know it’s a lie, but when the lie is virtually inescapable, when we let it into our heads and tell it to ourselves in our own voices ... it’s hard to remember what is true.”

Have you been seduced by parts of this approach at some point in your life? I was definitely affected by it. Has it been working for you? Have you been successful with it in the long term? Has it made you happier and more confident in your skin?

I assume it probably hasn’t or you wouldn’t be reading this workbook right now.

SELF-LOVE

Deep down you know you’re amazing, beautiful, and talented. The real problem is that you haven’t yet learned how to love and respect yourself as you are.

Most people think that they will be happier, will love their body more, will be more confident and more outgoing when they lose weight. But if they haven’t learned to love themselves as they are right now, they will not like themselves at a smaller size either. They will always find something wrong with them, something to be unhappy about.

Thin misery vs. fat misery, it’s still misery.

“If you don’t know how to show yourself kindness when you’re a size 18, you won’t know how to do it wearing a size 4.” – Unknown

FIND HAPPINESS INSIDE OF YOU

If we tie our happiness and self-love to a certain weight or a way that we want to look, we will always chase happiness and give away the inherent power we have to choose happiness and self-love now.

Self-love is your greatest ally. It doesn't mean that you need to accept your unwanted eating habit and never want to change. It means that you start loving you now. There is nothing wrong with you, you don't need to hate yourself. You just have an unwanted eating habit that you will be able to stop by finding ways to cheerlead, inspire, and uplift yourself to change.

"If you take the road of self-attack you will end up at the end of the road beat up. If you take the road of self-love to change yourself you will ultimately get where you wanna go."

Mark David

It's time to love your body right now and give it the best treatment. Giving it real food and time to rest. Overstuffing your body, forcing it to exercise excessively and restricting everything you like isn't love.

It's time to receive pleasure. It's time to be more confident. It's time to be the real you now.

6 AMAZING BENEFITS OF LEARNING TO LOVE YOURSELF

YOU'LL BE IN CHARGE

Instead of making bad choices because you're being led by shame, guilt, or fear, you will be empowered to make choices that truly make sense for who you are. It means, you will be living your authentic life. You will no longer be caught up with people-pleasing; instead, you will live a life that brings you satisfaction. Self-love means trying to honor yourself because you know your needs are just as important as others.

YOU SET BOUNDARIES & STICK TO THEM

Once you have the hang of honoring your needs you start to feel more confident, which means you are more assertive. Of course, this results in a more purposeful attitude, where you are strong enough to set clear boundaries with people *and* stick to them.

THE APPROVAL SEEKING WILL STOP

When you truly love yourself, you stop worrying about what everyone else thinks about you, which means you're a less defensive person and more confident about living a life that is

authentic for you. Why would you need acceptance from everyone else when you truly accept yourself?

YOU WILL BE A CONSCIOUS DECISION-MAKER

Loving yourself gives you the courage to cut things from your life that don't truly bring you joy or provide you with space to grow. It's easy to make courageous decisions when you value yourself and actively make choices that are intended to honor you, rather than risk harming you.

YOU WILL ENJOY ALONE TIME

A lot of people get caught up in keeping busy schedules simply because they're terrified of feeling or being alone. You surround yourself with people, throw yourself into work, and make decisions that help you avoid that loneliness. Why would you do all of the things that you *don't* love? You could be filling that time with things that you actually enjoy doing, whether it's swimming, painting, writing, or watching a movie. It doesn't need to feel scary to spend time alone; there is no reason not to enjoy time with yourself. Self-love brings more comfort when you're spending time in your own company.

YOU WILL FIND HAPPINESS

You don't need to find happiness in relationships, whether they're romantic or not. When you start loving yourself and taking responsibility for your own happiness instead of giving your power away to everyone else, you will naturally feel happier. If you're not in a romantic relationship you will find that you aren't as desperate to be in one as you once were because you know you don't need them. When the right person shows up, you will be ready for that love.

HOW TO START LOVING YOURSELF MORE

Probably you think self-love and pleasure are foolish and a waste of time and effort. Suffering seems more important and valuable and it's much more accepted by everyone.

But to be able to end the struggle with food you will need to start loving and taking better care of yourself even if you don't 'feel' like it. It might be hard work at first, but it's good, necessary, life-enhancing work, and you're worthy of it.

Start with baby steps.

NOURISH YOUR BODY

Eat with pleasure and appreciation (see Part X and XI).

START GETTING SOME SENSORY PLEASURES.

Your body is an amazing pleasure machine. (And I'm not just talking about sex.) However, we often don't even notice it because we spend most of the time in our head and not in our body. Start to spend more time in your body and enjoy the pleasures it can provide you every day. Use all your five senses (if you can).

List something you could do that would give you pleasure using your senses.

Taste: e.g. melt a piece of chocolate on your tongue, eat a juicy fruit, drink a cup of delicious coffee or tea.

Smell: e.g. cinnamon, vanilla, your favorite perfume, fresh herbs, flowers, essential oils.

Listen: e.g. your favorite songs, children laughing, uplifting podcasts, audiobooks.

See: e.g. a beautiful painting, the trees and birds outside, the stars and the moon, photos of people you love, photos of beautiful flowers or dresses, a walk in nature.

Touch: e.g. body lotion or shower gel on your skin, the wind in your hair, a massage, cuddle your child, loved one or pet, kisses, and other pleasurable touches.

Experience some of these pleasures every day. Pamper yourself more. Show your body some love. (Notice that these are also Self-Soothing, nervous system regulating exercises.)

TRY THE LOVING BLANKET EXERCISE

Close your eyes and imagine that someone who loves you (it can be you) puts a huge blanket of love around you. You don't need to see the person or know who it is. Feel the

love flowing into your body, filling you up with love. Stay with this image and feeling as long as you can or want to. Breathe in this feeling deeply and hold it for a few seconds. Repeat it.

TREAT YOURSELF.

Buy some new clothes, flowers or something else you enjoy (not food).

SURROUND YOURSELF WITH POSITIVE PEOPLE

Surround yourself with people who see the good in you. Remove the people from your life who criticize and discourage you.

The people we spend time with really affect us. Especially when you are in the process of learning to love yourself, you don't want people in your life who constantly criticize, discourage, or make fun of you or bring you down with their own body issues and self-hatred.

It's important to surround yourself with people who appreciate your strengths and accept your weaknesses.

If someone negatively affects you, politely thank them for their relationship and ask them if you can take a break from each other and not meet until you make some changes in your life. I know it's not always possible, for example, if this person is your boss or someone you financially depend on, but you can always look for ways to spend as little time with them as possible.

Build a team of supportive friends and colleagues, or have a coach who will support you, so you have someone to turn to when you would usually turn to food. (I offer daily availability to my private clients.)

ACHIEVEMENT LIST

To feel more empowered list all your achievements, everything you are proud of so far in your life. Ask yourself:

- What are my biggest achievements in my life?
- When did I manage to do the seemingly impossible?

- When did I feel totally loved?
- When did I feel super proud?
- When did I feel totally confident?
- What would my best friend say about me?
- What would a mentor or a nice family member name as my biggest achievement?

PRAISE YOURSELF

The truth is you are beautiful. Think of a woman you love. Think of her face, her eyes, her smile, her body. She probably doesn't look like a model in the magazines or on Instagram (even models don't look like that all the time) but you still love her and you find her beautiful. If she loves you too, I bet she also finds you beautiful.

"Kindness makes you the most beautiful person in the world no matter what you look like." – Unknown

So praise yourself often. Tell yourself you are beautiful and loveable. Compliment yourself.

Write down 10 things you love about yourself and why

Things I love about myself	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	

10.	
-----	--

Say to yourself: I love my body; it keeps me healthy and strong.

WRITE A LOVE LETTER TO YOURSELF OR YOUR BODY

Write it as you would write to someone you love, appreciatively, and ask for forgiveness for how you treated her in the past.

EXERCISE TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY, AND NOT TO LOSE WEIGHT OR PUNISH YOURSELF FOR EATING TOO MUCH

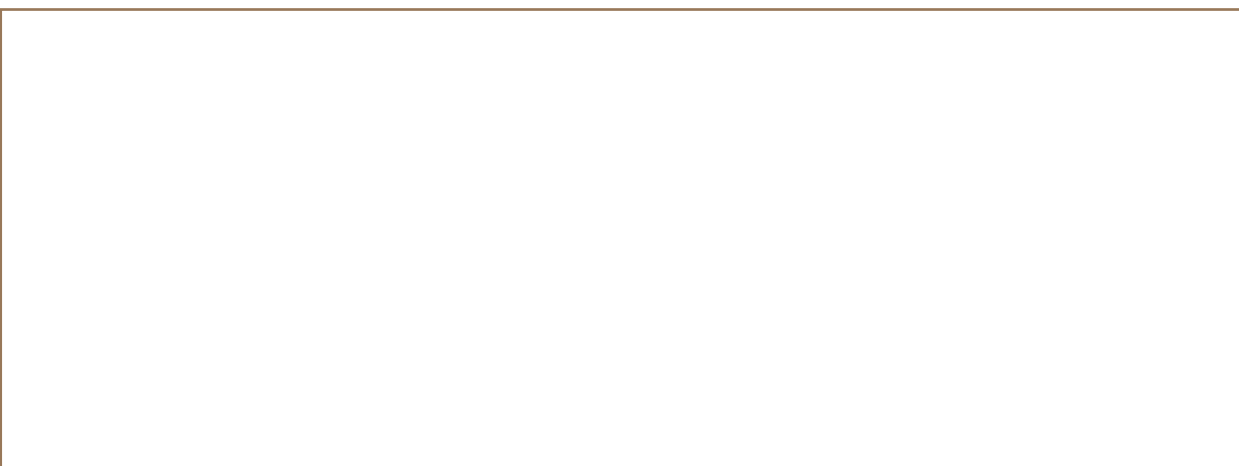
Give up gruelling exercise routines if you don't enjoy them. Instead take the dance class you've always wanted to or go for a bike ride. Or put on your favorite music and dance in your living room or your kitchen. Close your eyes, lose yourself in the song, and move your body how it wants to move.

Go for a hike, try (indoor) rock-climbing, salsa dancing, swimming, skating, yoga, pilates or just simply go for a walk. Do whatever you feel like doing. If you try new things be prepared to suck at it at the beginning. Everyone sucks at things they do the first time. Don't compare yourself to others.

Don't treat exercise as something that makes you thin because if you don't get slim you will think that exercise is pointless and you will stop doing it. Don't expect anything from it, just do it as a way of caring for your body. Exercising may become your favorite "date with yourself". You may discover some new music or a podcast you like listening to while exercising or walking. You will enjoy becoming stronger and having more stamina, better posture, and a calmer mind.

Weight-loss should be the by-product of exercising, not the goal.

Which exercise are you going to do, how many times a week? Set a minimum baseline exercise that you will do. It could be just a 10-minute walk 3 times a week, it doesn't need to be something ambitious. Make it a realistic plan that you can definitely do and then do it. You can always do more if you want to but set a minimum baseline. *The purpose of this is to learn to keep your promises. Keeping your promises will increase your self-esteem.*



CHANGE YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

“Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love.” Brene Brown

You are stuck with yourself for the rest of your life. Is it a good thought? Are you good company? Are you nice to yourself?

Your negative inner critic can really undermine your self-esteem and it can lead to low confidence, anxiety, self-sabotage, emotional eating, and even depression. If you want to stop emotional eating, it is especially important to quiet your inner critic since she can make it really hard or even impossible to achieve your goal. In fact, when you start to crave unhealthy habits, most of the time it is a sign of your inner critic's actions.

TALK TO YOURSELF LIKE YOU WOULD TO SOMEONE YOU LOVE

If we talked with our friends the way we talk to ourselves sometimes, we probably wouldn't have any friends. Try looking at yourself from the outside, as if you were one of your friends or a child and motivate, encourage, help, and most importantly love that person (yourself).

If a friend or child of yours wanted to lose weight, you wouldn't tell her/him that “Look at your huge belly! You will never be able to get rid of it. Why would you even try, eat this cake instead!” Would you? (I hope not :-))

When you find yourself saying negative, mean things to yourself, stop, and let yourself know that this kind of behavior is not acceptable.

You can dislike what you did and still love yourself. Look at yourself from the outside and you will understand better why you did what you did.

HUMMING AND GIBBERISH

Brial Alman, one of the world's leading mind-body stress experts, suggests that when the chatter in your head is too loud try humming or speaking gibberish. Take a deep breath and as you breathe out, hum all the way to the end of your breath. Feel your own vibration. The longer you can hum, the faster you will quiet your mind. Do this for about a minute, or for about twenty breaths. Hum louder than your thoughts.

Another great way to quiet your mind is speaking gibberish. You've spoken it before when you were a baby. It came naturally to you before you learned to speak and it calmed you and made you feel good. It still works the same way. Make up your own gibberish language and speak it for one or two minutes when you want to quiet your mind. It may sound crazy, but this is a playful, creative, funny, and relaxing activity that you will probably enjoy if you give it a chance.

LIVE IN THE PRESENT

Your negative thoughts are often related to the past or the future. You are dwelling on something that happened in the past or you are worried about the future.

Live in the present, not in your head!

Don't dwell on the past, you can't change it anyway. Give your best in the present, pay attention to your present feelings, and learn from them. Then you won't need to worry about the future. Look at yourself again from the outside and try to figure out what initiated the negative thoughts. Develop your own strategies for responding differently in these situations in the future instead of relying on your (unhelpful) automatic reactions.

Remember, you start with a clean sheet every day.

TREAT YOUR NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AS UNWANTED GUESTS

Your negative thoughts are just unwanted guests in your head, so don't make a big deal out of them. You will just make them stronger. Let them come and go, as I said about your feelings and urge thoughts. **Don't fight them; try to accept them without criticism.**

Imagine your unwanted negative thoughts as fluffy clouds flying across the clear blue sky.

You can just ignore the negative thoughts but for many people it's easier to dismiss them if they think a positive thoughts after the negative.

The positive thought should be something that you can believe. For example, thinking: "I look amazing!" probably will get the reaction of: "No, you don't!". But "I'm working on accepting myself" could sound acceptable even for your inner critic.

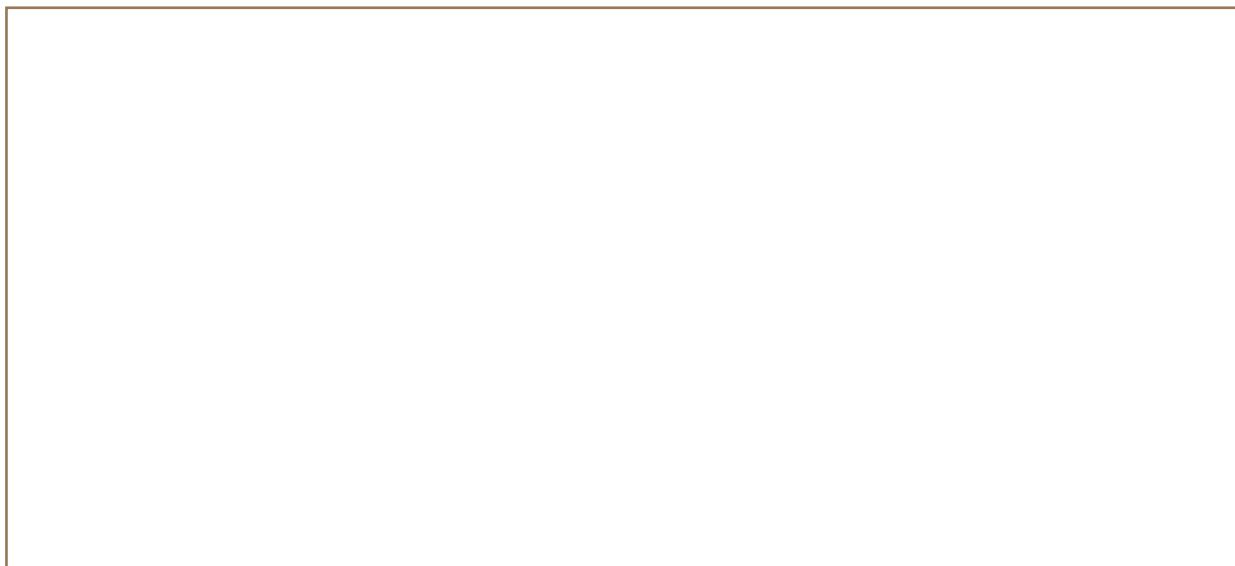
“I could overeat/binge whenever I want to but I choose not to.”

“Failure doesn’t exist. I either win or learn.”

“I deserve to be healthy, happy, and successful.”

Remember that you are what you think about yourself.

What are the negative thoughts you regularly think about yourself? Write them down and write a positive thought after them that you are going to use whenever the negative thoughts pop up in your head.

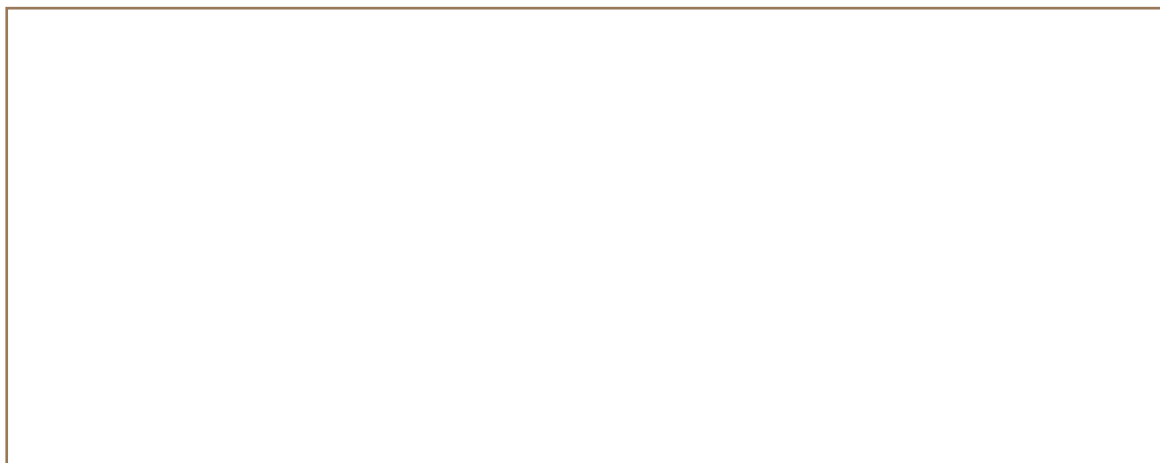


DO DIFFICULT THINGS

When things come easy to us, we don’t feel as proud as when they are more difficult.

When you acknowledge that something is difficult and you don’t feel like doing it but then you do it anyway, you make yourself proud. Self-pride must be earned, cannot be taken away and tastes better than any food. It’s a good way to build your self-confidence and self-love. Find your strengths and use them.

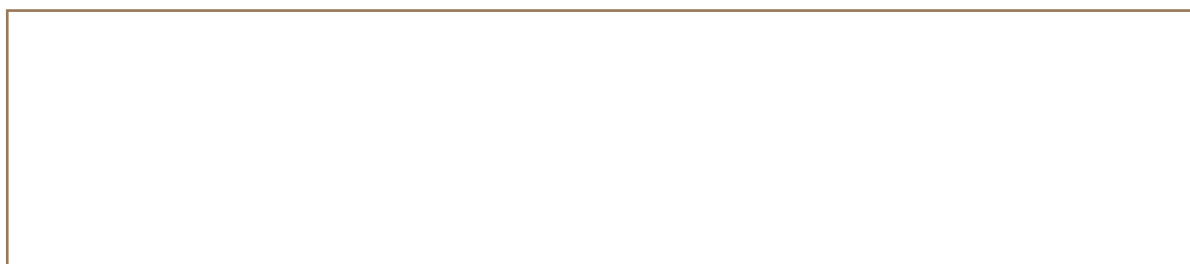
What are your strengths?



FIND YOUR PASSION AND PURPOSE

Often we eat because we are bored of our lives. Find your passion and purpose and you won't be bored any longer. If you don't know how to do it, try [this guide](#). You are born with a special talent or skill that you are really good at and love doing. You just need to find it inside of you. It might be really easy and obvious for some (musicians, writers, painters, and other artists). Some talents and skills are not so straightforward, like helping people, being a good mother, or providing for the family.

Your purpose is your reason for living. I give you three methods [in the guide](#) to discover the purpose of your life.

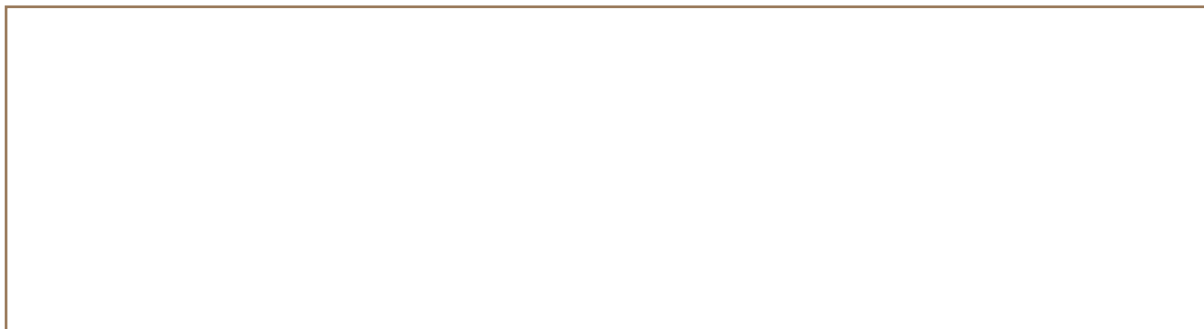


SELF-CARE

One of the biggest challenges we have in loving ourselves is our natural desire to make others happy. But too often you will neglect yourself in the process.

To make sure that you don't forget about yourself schedule the activities that help you care for yourself. As you start doing these activities, after a while they become a routine. You'll create a balance between loving others and loving yourself.

What activities will you try first to start loving yourself more? When and how often are you going to practice them? Put them into your calendar. Reward yourself if you stick to them.



Then try some new ones.

You might want to read [this article](#) from Sarah Siders too, I really enjoyed it and related to it.

I'm so excited that you are starting to love yourself more and more every day. It will truly change your life. Let's do this!

DREAM
MORE

PART VII UPDATING YOUR CORE BELIEFS

YOUR LIMITING BELIEFS ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR WEIGHT AND BODY

“You’ve been criticizing yourself for years and it hasn’t worked. Try approving of yourself and see what happens.” —Louise Hay

Sometimes we have so many failures and associations with pain related to eating, our weight and body image that we start to form the belief that we can’t do anything to make it better. You may start to feel that it’s pointless to try anything new because you will fail again anyway. In psychology, this mindset is called **learned helplessness**.

Those thoughts and feelings will keep you stuck. If you keep thinking based on those past experiences, you will never create anything other than what you have always done. **Your life will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.**

If your internal belief system clashes with your goal of stopping overeating, it will never happen.

We learned our beliefs from our parents, siblings, teachers, friends, books, social media, and other sources in our lives. Our beliefs are filters we see the world through; they are information we heard, memories, and old behaviors that our brain stored and then became our reality.

Our brain constantly looks for evidence to strengthen these beliefs and filters out everything that would weaken them. Now, these beliefs create our thoughts and feelings about everything, and they drive our automatic actions. And most of the time we are not even aware of them.

Dr. Martin Seligman, in his book *Learned Optimism*, describes three specific patterns of beliefs that cause us to feel helpless: **permanence, pervasiveness, and personal.**

Let’s see how these patterns of beliefs relate to overeating:

Permanence

Disempowering belief of a pessimist: I have failed so many times in the past there is no way I can stop overeating, **ever**.

Empowering belief of an optimist: Overeating is only a habit that I can stop doing once I learn how to do it.

Pervasiveness

Disempowering belief: **My whole life is destroyed** because I can't stop overeating.

Empowering belief: It's just a challenge with my eating pattern that I can get over.

Personal

Disempowering belief: **I am the problem**. I'm a failure. I have no willpower. I am lazy. I can't stick to any plan.

Empowering belief: It's a habit I formed, and it has nothing to do with my personality. I did what I could according to my best knowledge at that time.

If you want to change your results don't focus on your behaviors, focus on the beliefs that drive these behaviors.

Our limiting, disempowering beliefs stop us from taking action when we want to do something new based on past (negative) experiences.

If you dieted before or tried to stop overeating and failed every single time, your brain sees that as pain and wants to protect you from this pain. So it creates beliefs that cause you to think

"I can't do this, I don't have enough willpower, nothing works for me".

These beliefs make you give up and not even try to change or if you do try to change, you end up self-sabotaging your efforts.

It is important that you acknowledge these disempowering negative beliefs about yourself and replace them with positive, empowering beliefs. Remember, as long as you believe

something, your brain automatically searches for references to validate your belief and filters everything out that would question it, regardless of whether your belief is positive or negative.

I hope now you see that **figuring out why you eat when you are not physically hungry starts with your beliefs**. The beliefs that gave you the results you see today; your body, your weight, and how you feel about yourself.

So let's discover your beliefs about food, yourself, your weight, and your body. Then we will identify your disempowering beliefs and replace them with empowering positive beliefs.

IDENTIFYING YOUR BELIEFS

The very important first step is to brainstorm and come up with all the beliefs you can think of, positive or negative, about food, yourself, your weight, and your body.

Think back to your childhood and note down any memories related to eating, weight, and body image that may have impacted your own attitude towards these things. Think about the different members of your family, your friends and teachers, and the memories or beliefs you associate with each of them.

What surprises you about these memories? What do they teach you?

Think about your *if-then beliefs*: If I do ..., then I will

Think about your *global beliefs* about yourself, food, etc. For example healthy food is boring, thin people are mean...

What are you *afraid of* happening if you stop emotional eating?

Is there a reason you'd rather not stop? *What holds you back?*

EXAMPLES OF LIMITING AND EMPOWERING BELIEFS

I have listed some typical disempowering beliefs people have about their life and their body (they are inspired and based on Jessica Ortner's ebook: 103 disempowering beliefs about weight loss and body confidence).

As overeating and emotional eating often lead to weight gain or these habits formed due to diets in the past, I've included beliefs about weight loss too. Go through the list and rate

each belief (disempowering and empowering) on how true it feels on a scale of 0 - 10, with 10 being completely true, and 0 being not true at all.

Even if you think you already know your limiting beliefs, please take the time to read through this list. Be honest with yourself about how true each one feels.

After you've identified your limiting beliefs, you'll learn how to delete them and then replace them with new, empowering beliefs that support you on your journey to curb your emotional eating.

	DISEMPOWERING BELIEF	RATING (1-10)	EMPOWERING BELIEF	RATING (1-10)
1.	Food is how I enjoy myself.		I can take pleasure in many other things.	
2.	Eating helps me relax.		I can use meditation, exercise, and other ways to relax.	
3.	When I'm eating, life seems easier.		I can find other ways to release stress.	
4.	I need comfort food to feel better.		I don't need food for comfort. I can do other things to comfort myself.	
5.	I'm a mom/wife/professional/entrepreneur, I don't have time for me.		Making time to care for me makes me an even better mom/ wife/ professional/entrepreneur.	
6.	My kids have to come first.		By taking care of myself, I'm showing my kids how to value and care for themselves in healthy and balanced ways.	
7.	I have to eat on the go. I don't have time for real meals.		I can take time to do healthy things that make me feel good, and that includes preparing balanced meals.	

8.	If I can't cook it in the microwave, I don't have time for it.		I'm excited to eat more fresh food that's not right out of my microwave.	
9.	My body changed after I had kids.		I am so grateful to my body for giving me kids. Now it's time to take better care of it.	
10.	I'll never have the body I had before I had kids.		Having children is a reason to love my body more, not less.	
11.	My metabolism just isn't what it used to be.		My metabolism can and will change as I adopt a healthier lifestyle and stop overeating.	
12.	This is the food I grew up eating.		I'm willing to try new ways of cooking, eating, and living my life.	
13.	I'm weak because I can't control my cravings.		I can use the tools I learn here to calm intense food cravings and allow myself to relax.	
14.	My whole family is heavy/overweight.		My family's weight doesn't determine mine.	
15.	My friends/family don't like it when I lose weight.		I can lose weight for me, not to please other people.	
16.	I can't live without sweets.		I can use the tools learned here to quiet cravings, and then make a choice that supports my health and wellness.	
17.	If I see sweets, I have to eat them.		If I see sweets and feel tempted, I can use the tools I learned to calm my craving.	
18.	As soon as I see food, I have to eat it.		I can create a healthier and more balanced relationship with food.	
19.	I'm always hungry.		I can use my new tools to discover why I'm hungry.	
20.	I don't have time for meditation.		Meditation makes me feel so much more relaxed, it's worth taking time for.	

21.	I hate my body.		I am grateful for all my body has done for me.	
22.	I look fat no matter what I weigh.		It's safe for me to see my body in a new light.	
23.	I'll never be attractive.		I can let my light shine whenever and however I choose.	
24.	People will notice me if I lose weight.		I can feel safe attracting attention.	
25.	I don't like getting attention.		I can attract attention and still feel safe.	
26.	Every time I lose weight, it comes right back.		I can learn the tools to help me relax, lose weight, and keep it off.	
27.	I've been heavy since I was a kid.		I've been heavy for a long time, and I'm ready to change that.	
28.	Healthy food doesn't fill me up.		Healthy food can be very satisfying.	
29.	Cooking my own food is too much work.		I can relax and enjoy cooking healthier food for myself.	
30.	I can't live without _____.		I can make healthy choices and still enjoy treats, just in moderation.	
31.	The holidays just won't be the same without all that great food.		I can enjoy the holidays, including the food, without overstuffing myself.	
32.	No matter what I try, I can't lose weight.		My past experiences don't determine my present or future.	
33.	I can never lose more than ___ lbs.		My body can shed weight naturally.	
34.	I need to lose weight before I can sort out my relationship with food.		I can lose weight healthily once I sorted out my relationship with food.	
35.	I'm big-boned.		Calling myself "fat" and "big-boned" makes me feel bad, so I'm going to practice not using those labels.	

36.	I don't have the body type to be thin.		I can appreciate my body as it is, and support it even more by losing weight in a healthy, balanced, and nourishing way.	
37.	I can't stop bingeing and restricting because I'll gain weight.		If I stop restricting I'll stop bingeing and will lose weight.	
38.	People don't like me because I'm big.		People who matters like me for who I am.	
39.	People feel sorry for me because I'm big.		People who matters appreciate me for who I am.	
40.	I'm a failure because I'm big.		My weight does not define me or my life.	
41.	To lose weight, I have to starve myself.		I can lose weight while still really enjoying food, just in moderation.	
42.	To lose weight, I have to give up everything I love.		I can lose weight and still do things I love to do.	
43.	To lose weight, I have to stop going out with friends/family.		I can still have a great social life when I'm losing weight.	
44.	Losing weight means giving up everything that's fun.		I can lose weight and enjoy my life even more.	
45.	Keeping weight off is too hard.		I can keep the weight off without depriving myself.	

Which negative beliefs got the highest scores? Those are your disempowering beliefs, plus the beliefs you found in the previous brainstorming exercise.

Congratulations, you've identified your negative beliefs! This was a very important step towards your freedom from overeating.

Make sure to save your list of limiting beliefs, since you'll need them for the next exercises.

After doing this exercise, people often feel bad about discovering a lot of limiting beliefs about themselves. But don't worry, it's completely normal to have a long list! Usually, there

are a few key limiting beliefs that are the biggest blocks. Once those are eliminated, your life will quickly start to transform.

Have you also found high scoring empowering beliefs? No problem if you haven't, we will work on that in the next parts.

DELETING OLD NEGATIVE BELIEFS

Here you will find exercises to reprogram your subconscious mind and delete your negative beliefs.

Write down with a pencil all your disempowering/limiting beliefs you discovered in one column.

DISEMPOWERING BELIEFS (WITH A PENCIL)	EMPOWERING BELIEFS (WITH A PEN)

DISEMPOWERING BELIEFS

Read these beliefs when you can be alone and no one disturbs you, **and feel the feelings that come up during the process.**

Stop at each belief and tune in to how your body feels.

Do you have some stress and anxiety around this belief? I want you to know that it is safe to feel these feelings.

How do you feel? Why do you feel this way?

If these feelings are too much to handle, try to look at the belief from the outside as if you were someone else, someone who loves and supports you. What would this person say?

Is this belief true or just a story?

Are you absolutely sure it's true? If you were in court could you defend it?

Is it possible that it's not true?

How would you feel if it wasn't true?

Is the person you learned this belief from worth modelling in this area?

Can you let this negative belief go?

What will it cost you emotionally if you don't let this belief go?

What will it cost you in your relationships if you don't let this belief go?

What will it cost you physically if you don't let this belief go?

What will it cost you financially if you don't let this belief go? How much money could you save if you stopped spending money on food that your body doesn't need?

What will it cost to your family/loved ones if you don't let this belief go?

Your past is not your future. Past experiences are not predictive of future results. Welcome the past, embrace it, accept it, learn from it. But don't let it hold you back. Don't let your past stories and beliefs imprison you. Let them go, release them, set them free, unclench your fist that is holding them tight, drop them.

Choose to let go and forgive any people or situations that caused you pain in the past.

Forgiveness sets you free. Forgive yourself too!

The more positivity you add into your life, the better you will feel, and the less you will need to find joy, fulfilment, or relief in eating.

POSITIVE BELIEFS

Now for each negative belief write a new story reframed in a positive way. These are your empowering beliefs. Read these too and feel the feelings that come up. Tune into your body again.

Choose these new beliefs in a way that they feel believable. Something that you can believe in. For example instead of *I love my body* you may find *I'm learning to love my body* more believable at the beginning. (I help my clients discover and rewrite their beliefs as this can be a bit challenging on your own.)

What will you no longer be available for, as of today?

What are your new positive, empowering, life-enhancing beliefs? Write them in the table above.

NEXT 14 DAYS

Now go through the limiting beliefs list and read the beliefs out loud and say after each of them to your subconscious mind: **“Thank you for storing this for me but it no longer serves me. Cancel, clear, delete”** & rub them off with a rubber or scribble them over.

You can also write all your limiting beliefs on a separate piece of paper and safely burn the paper.

From now on read only the positive beliefs for 14 days. Really concentrate on the emotions and feelings that these positive beliefs generate for you. Use them as mantras. You may still have some resistance to them and feel like you can't fully believe them. Don't worry. With the exercises in the following section, we will strengthen these beliefs.

Track the days when you've read your beliefs: add ticks or “done” to the columns when you have read the beliefs and tuned into your feelings about them.

Well done, you have done it!! You are amazing! You are making great progress.

STERNGTHENING NEW POSITIVE BELIEFS

Beliefs started as ideas at the beginning. You heard something from someone. Then you looked for evidence to support this idea and the more evidence you found the stronger this belief became.

The problem is that you can find evidence for whatever you want to concentrate on. Let's say you heard from someone that you will gain weight as you get older. You started to look for evidence and you found that indeed your mother and your grandmother gained weight as they aged. But you could have equally easily found evidence for the opposite too: your other grandmother and the neighbor lady are thin and they are in their 70s. The references we find are always distorted by our perspective and our brain filters for the information that supports our beliefs.

So now, to strengthen your new empowering beliefs, look for pieces of evidence that prove the positive belief true. Look for at least 3 references for each of your new empowering beliefs.

Start acting as if you believe your new beliefs. Your subconscious mind will start to filter for information supporting your new beliefs.

Also, start to take action based on your new beliefs. The results of these new actions will provide new evidence to prove your new beliefs.

If you are still struggling, ask yourself: What would I have to believe to succeed? What would my successful future-self do in this situation? Who is already successful in this area and what do they believe that I don't? Copy them.

Spend time with these people and their positive beliefs will rub onto you too. The more opportunities you have to see positive examples of a healthy relationship with food, weight management without dieting, love, success, and happiness, the more you will change your beliefs about your own life and possibilities. If you can't find these people in your real life, find them online. Watch happy movies, find positive online friends or a coach.

NEW EMPOWERING BELIEF	EVIDENCE
1.	1.
	2.
	3.

2.	1.
	2.
	3.
3.	1.
	2.
	3.
4.	1.
	2.

	3.
5.	1.
	2.
	3.
6.	1.
	2.
	3.

7.	1.
	2.
	3.

SHIFTING YOUR IDENTITY

Find as much evidence as you can to prove yourself that your new beliefs are true. Embrace and repeat these new beliefs with feelings millions of times until the subconscious memorizes them. The higher the emotional state when you feel into your new core beliefs, the less repetition is needed. **By adopting these new beliefs you shift your identity.**

Try the following tips to strengthen your new beliefs:

- Record your positive statements in your own voice and listen to them whenever you can in the background (while driving, walking, cleaning, etc.) and before you go to sleep.
- Write your empowering beliefs on Post-its and stick them where you can see them often, for example on your bathroom mirror so that you see it first thing in the morning and before you go to bed.
- Use canva.com or PowerPoint to create graphics for each of your positive beliefs and set them as a rolling screensaver on your desktop and phone.

Congratulations on finishing this section! This was a very long and important topic. Well done getting through it!

Come back to this section often, especially if you find new blocks in your way to reaching your goal, and check if you have any undiscovered limiting, disempowering beliefs that you need to replace with empowering beliefs.

Core beliefs are stored in the subconscious and need to be updated as we evolve to match our new identity.





PART VIII SELF-SABOTAGING YOUR EFFORTS

Self-sabotage is such an important topic that I want to talk about it separately here.

Self-sabotage is when you know you should do something but you don't do it anyway. Or you reach a certain level of success but you start to feel uncomfortable and you return to your old habits and self-sabotage your success.

Before we start discussing this topic, I want you to do something. Whenever something negative happens (overeating, bingeing) that makes you feel bad, the first step is to accept that feeling. Look in the mirror and repeat to yourself:

I feel , and I'm ok with that, I accept it.

Self-acceptance is key, and you should accept yourself in all shapes and forms.

FEAR OF FAILURE

"People who self-handicap purposely shoot themselves in the foot in order to protect themselves from having to confront their possible shortcomings. Many self-handicapping behaviors are those small, subtle bad habits like being late, gossiping, micromanaging, behaving passive-aggressively, or being a perfectionist. We may not recognize these self-defeating--and self-handicapping--traits for what they are. Or we may even wrongly perceive them as strengths. But in truth, they often get in the way of us blooming." — Rich Karlgaard

Maybe you tried to lose weight or give up overeating and emotional eating but you have never managed to succeed. Now you don't even want to try because you are scared that you will fail again. Every failure has a negative effect on your self-esteem and this can be damaging, especially when your self-esteem is not very strong to start with.

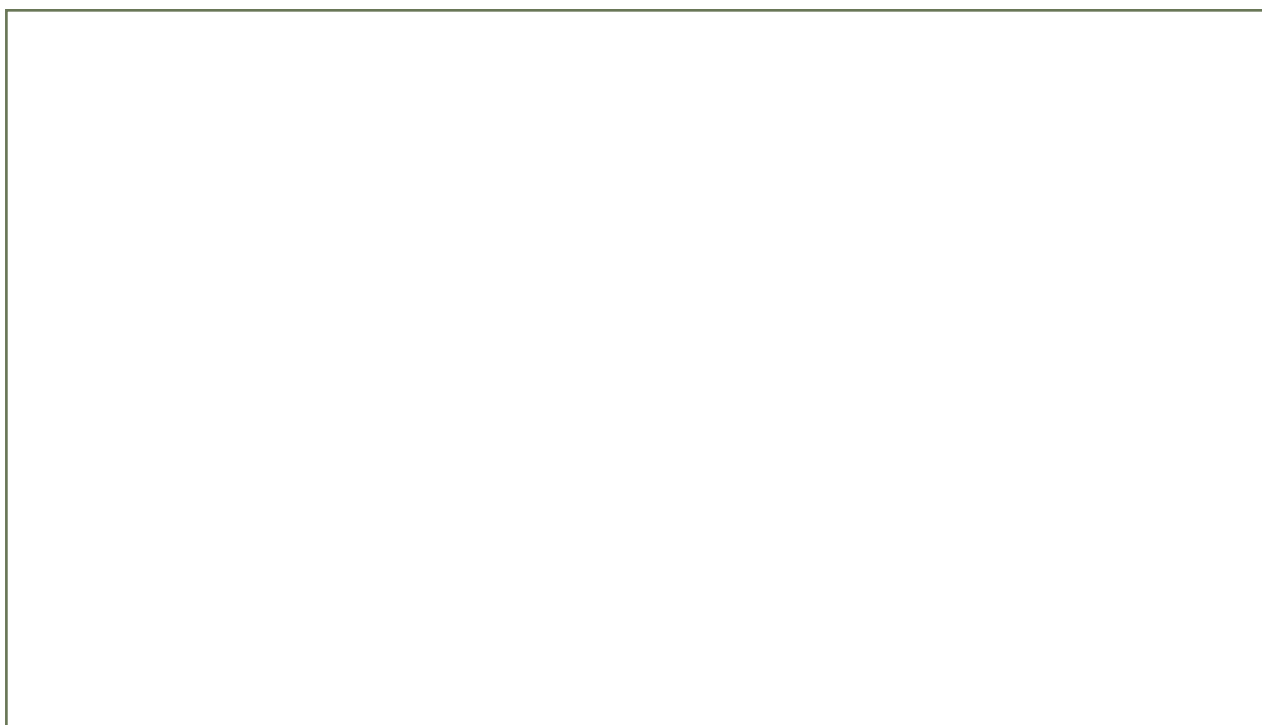
Your **fear of failure** might manifest itself in thoughts (beliefs) that getting rid of your unwanted eating habits

- is too difficult
- takes too long

- is impossible because you won't have the willpower to do it
- means that you will have to deprive yourself.

These negative thoughts (beliefs) will stop you either during the process or might even stop you before you get started.

What negative thoughts and feelings do you associate with giving up overeating or emotional eating?



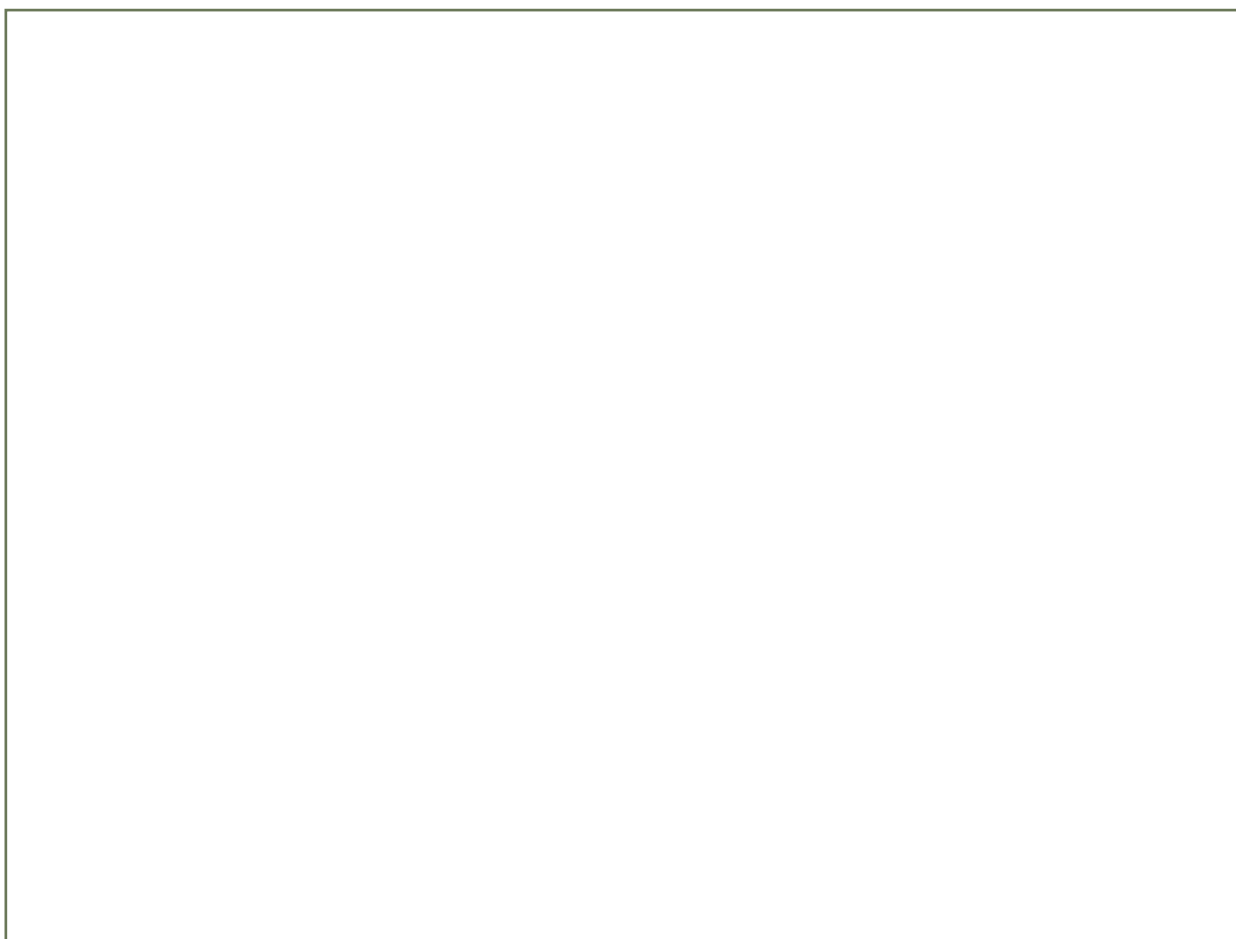
FEAR OF SUCCESS

"Sometimes we self-sabotage just when things seem to be going smoothly. Perhaps this is a way to express our fear about whether it is okay for us to have a better life. We are bound to feel anxious as we leave behind old notions of our unworthiness. The challenge is not to be fearless, but to develop strategies of acknowledging our fears and finding out how we can allay them."— Maureen Brady

Another reason for self-sabotage is **fear of success**.

There is always a downside to our dreams. Of course, you want to end the struggle with overeating and emotional eating, you want to eat normally again, you don't want to think about food all the time and you want to lose the extra weight you gained due to eating when you were not hungry. But there is always something lurking in your mind that makes you feel bad about your success. Probably you are not even aware of these thoughts and feelings but they make you self-sabotage. You need to get really clear of them.

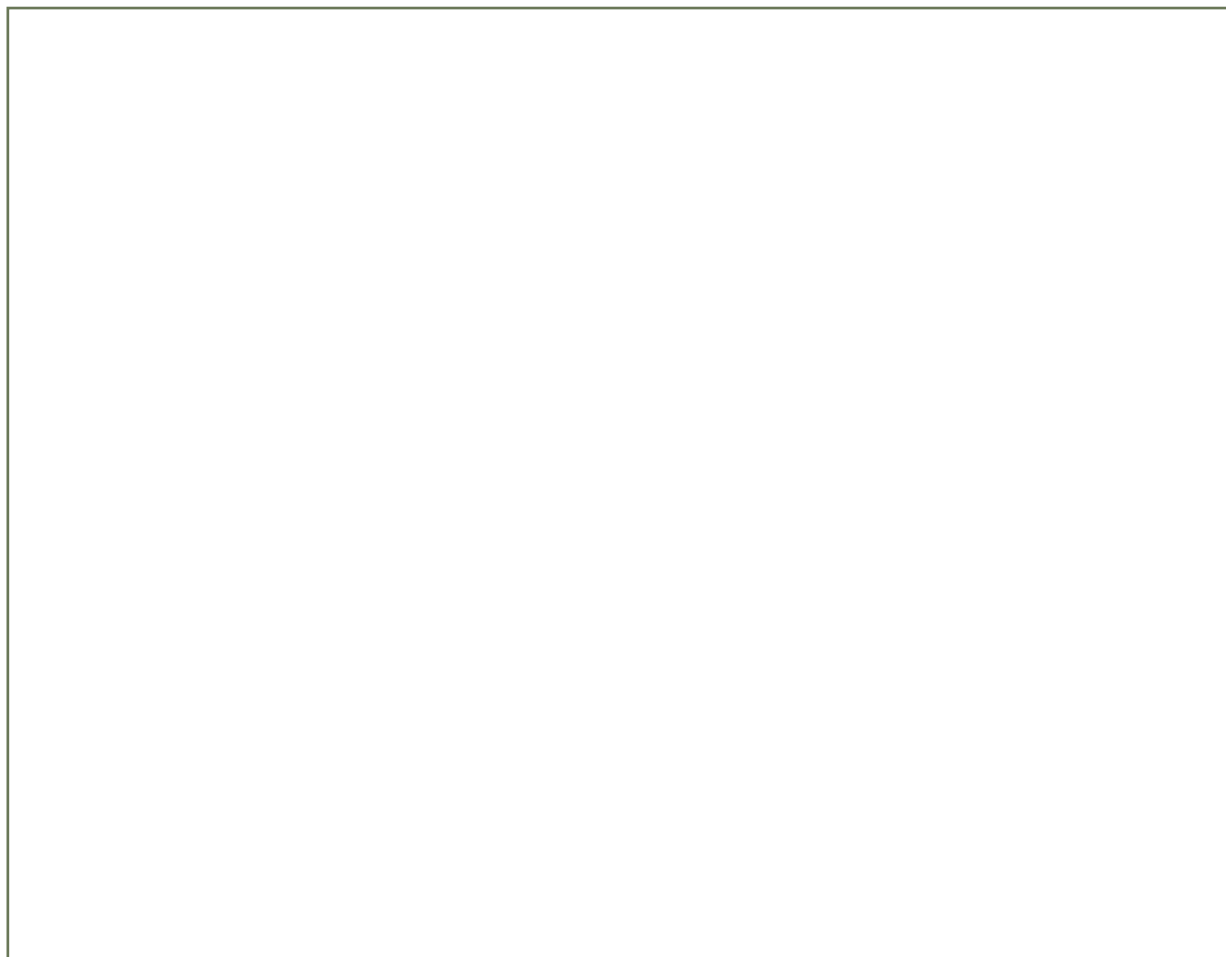
What are the downsides of your goal? If you stop emotional eating/overeating what bad things can happen? E.g. if I stop emotional eating I need to face my feelings, I won't be able to use food to release stress, I need to pay attention to my hunger signals, my overweight friends will not accept me, I will lose my protective fat layer and people will notice me, I might attract sexual attention, etc.

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Now imagine for both fears (fear of failure and fear of success) the worst-case scenario.

Imagine all the details of it. This way you already know what awaits you, your mind knows what to expect, and it won't be so afraid of it. If you prepare yourself for the worst scenario you won't be so anxious about it.

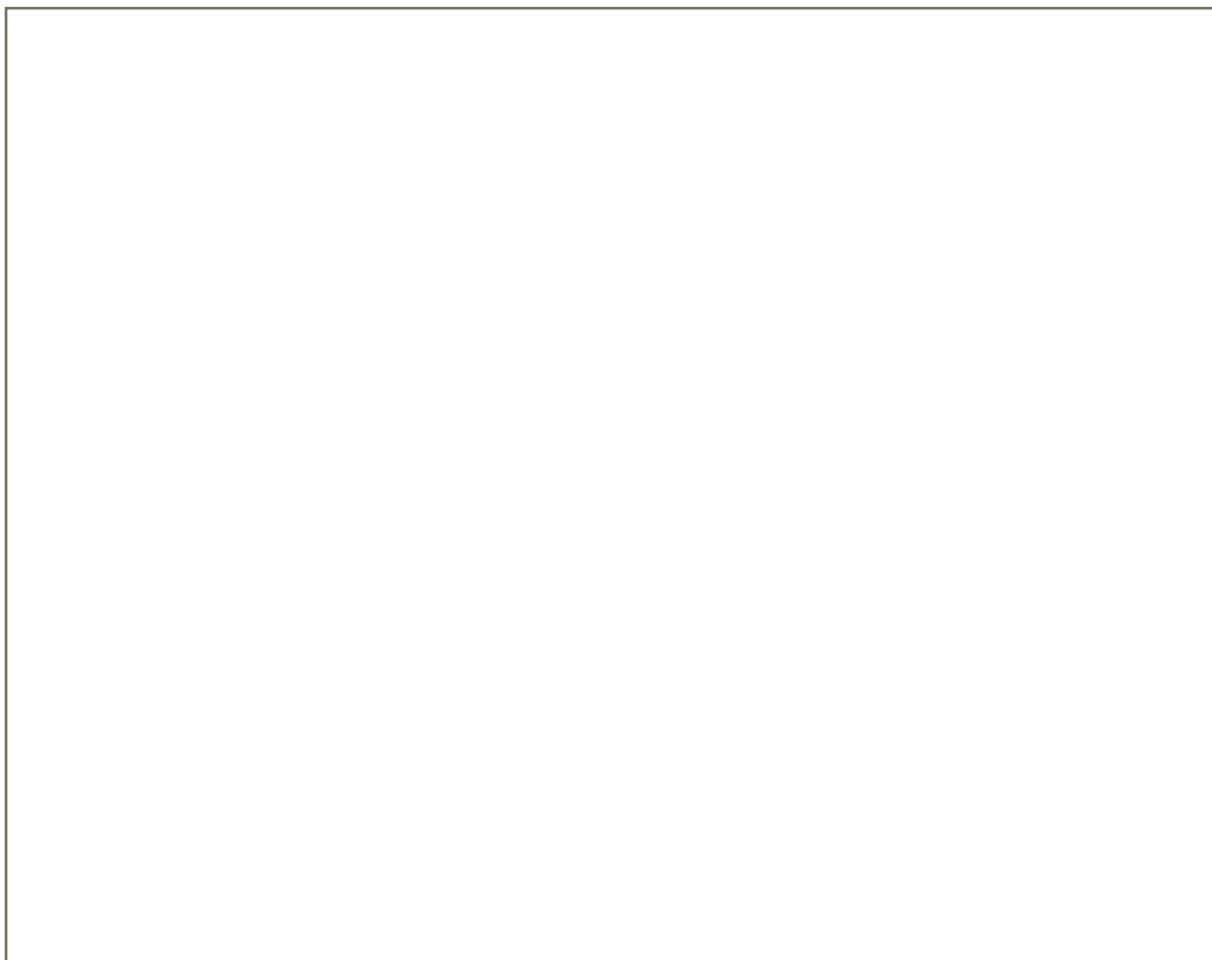
What's the worst thing that can happen? E.g. Even though I will have to face my feelings, what's the worst thing that can happen? Keep asking for each fear until you reach a point when no more answers come. You will see that it won't kill you, you will realize that nothing really bad will happen, and if it happens it happens. Then create a backup plan for this situation. This way you reassure your brain that even if something goes wrong you will be able to handle it.

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The next step is to add a pleasurable experience to the negative experience. For example, even though I will have to face my feelings, I will buy myself a nice dress because I will lose weight if I don't overeat anymore. Trick your brain by praising yourself when something bad happens.

Praise yourself for failure. As humans we fail a lot and that is ok. Failure is just feedback that you can learn from.

What pleasurable experiences are you going to add to your negative experiences? Find one for each of the downsides.

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The final step is to do the **Future-self guided visualization**. It will help you imagine the BEST thing that can happen, and you will use your imagination to explore that scenario.

Remember the Fairy Godmother exercise from the beginning of the workbook. Find your list, update it if needed, and visualize this version of you every day.

After practicing these exercises, negative situations won't cause you anxiety, instead they will be completely neutral. Therefore, they will not make you self-sabotage.

WORRYING AND FEAR

The remedy for our childhood fear of monsters lurking under the bed was to shine a light into the darkness. Once we did, it revealed the truth – there were no monsters. Once we shine the light of truth at what scares us, we often discover our fears to be unfounded.

It's human nature to worry. But **research has shown that 85% of what you worry about never actually happens.**

Let that sink in for a moment.

MOST OF YOUR FEARS NEVER COME TRUE!

The same research reveals that, when misfortune did occur, people found they usually handled the situation better than expected. Not only that, they learned something valuable from their 'misfortune', often even feeling as though the fear was worse than the actual situation.

When you feel fear, you need to learn to feel excited.

Stop saying, "Oh, but I'm so afraid, I'm so scared, I really don't want to do this"! You need to tell yourself, "I can do this, I'll do it, I cannot wait to see what it will be like, I'm so curious"! You have to paint the event exciting, interesting, and joyful in your mind because our mind leads us to pleasant experiences and wants to protect us from unpleasant experiences at all costs.

When it comes right down to it, we don't have much control over the good and bad things that happen to us. Two critical things we do have control over is our mindset and our responses to our circumstances.

Think of a fear you're facing (or avoiding) right now. Ask yourself, what would your life look like if you decided to face that fear, head on? What would it feel like if you showed courage, even a little bit? The courage to take a risk. The courage to be your true self. The courage to love others. The courage to love yourself.

Will it be easy? No. Will you face obstacles? Yes. Will you make mistakes? Yes.

But remember, your dreams aren't meant to collect dust on a shelf or, even more heartbreakingly, to be taken with you to your grave.

MASOCHISTIC EQUILIBRIUM (OR CONTAINER WORK)

I heard about masochistic equilibrium from Karen Salmansohn, a happiness guru. Other teachers call it “container” work. It’s like having an **internal maximum happiness thermostat** that tells you how much goodness you can or deserve to have. If for some reason **you are happier than your set maximum, it feels “too good to be true” and you start self-sabotaging your happiness.**

Your “container” is your energetic and emotional set point of how good you allow your life to get without panicking and self-sabotaging. For example, some people may have a large container for money but a small container for their dream body. Others may have a large container for allowing themselves to have their dream body but have a very small container for love.

This set point is formed much earlier in your life. Maybe your parents fought a lot when you were a child and this became your “normal” model. Therefore, whenever you are in a peaceful relationship you feel uneasy and start to fight or cause trouble to go back to your “normal” level.

Maybe your mother was always on a diet but never managed to lose weight and this is what your subconscious mind finds “normal”. Consequently, whenever you lose weight it makes you self-sabotage and you gain the weight back.

Basically, due to your past experiences and maybe traumas you are only comfortable with a certain amount of goodness in your life.

In emotional eating specifically, this shows up, for example, when:

- calm evenings feel unsettling → food fills the gap
- pleasure or satisfaction triggers guilt → eating becomes punishment
- consistency feels “too good” → a binge restores the old identity.

Expanding the container means the nervous system no longer needs food, control, or struggle to regulate back to its familiar set point. *Good becomes safe.*

“What is required for many of us, paradoxical though it may sound, is the courage to tolerate happiness without self-sabotage.” — Nathaniel Branden

So how can we expand our containers/set point?

First thing to do is updating your core beliefs in the problematic area. (You’ve started to do this in the previous chapter. Just keep doing it.)

Be prepared to feel uncomfortable for a while when you start having the desired results.

Expand your ability to hold more joy and ease in your nervous system. It’s similar to the practice of dismissing an urge to overeat. But in this case you use the nervous system regulating tools to make goodness feel safe.

Go slower than you think you should. Expansion happens in micro-doses. Ask yourself: How much good can I allow *today* without tightening? Examples:

- Let yourself rest for 5 minutes longer
- Eat only 2 bites less than usual
- Receive a compliment without deflecting
- Stop working when you said you would
- Then pause and notice what happens in your body. Try to stay present without escaping.

When something feels good, notice:

- Do you brace?
- Do you distract?
- Do you reach for food, your phone, or work?

Practice saying internally: *“Nothing is wrong right now.”* Let the goodness land. Let it be awkward, let it be unfamiliar. Let the good feeling amplify, sit with it as long as you can. Let your nervous system familiarize itself with these good feelings.

Normalize the new set point/container. Instead of celebrating only big wins, normalize calm days, neutral eating, emotional steadiness, ease without guilt. Make them “no big deal” by

letting them be a part of your identity not something happens once in a while or accidentally.

Say to yourself: *This normal. I can have all this goodness every day.*

FIND YOUR PASSION OR A HOBBY

According to Carl Jung when our lives don't have meaning and purpose we indulge in bad habits to create drama and excitement to have something stimulating and interesting in our life, even if this is a bad thing. Jung calls this phenomenon "low-level spiritual quests".

The easiest way to stop doing this is to find a passion or hobby (a "high-level spiritual quest") that you really enjoy doing and that can give you a purpose and spark that feeling of happy excitement. It could be writing, painting, photography, dancing, anything.

INTEGRATION OF PARTS

As I mentioned in the How to stop binge eating chapter, you have two parts. Let's call it "parts" because people refer to it that way:

- Part of me just took over.
- There is a part of me I can't control.
- Part of me wants to stop, but another part wants to continue.

One part is your conscious mind that wants to change. It thinks logically, it knows that change is beneficial and your life will improve if you change your habits and it's fully on board. The other part, tries to protect you from pain. This part formed a long time ago to deal with a certain pain but this pain is most likely not relevant anymore.

For example, you may associate chocolate with love because when you were a child someone expressed their love by giving you chocolate. Now you think you crave chocolate but what you truly want is love. But your subconscious always suggests you eat chocolate whenever you feel unloved or lonely because it is acting on the information that chocolate made you feel loved when you were a child.

This part of you has good intentions. It tries to help you even when you want it to go away; even if you hate it, it remains. It's very persistent and convinced that it's doing something good for you.

This part of you is really important and valuable: we need to have a part that protects us from pain and danger. What you need to do is to acknowledge its good intentions, thank it for trying to help you relentlessly, and maybe even apologize for being mean to it. Then you want to update the information that it is basing its actions on (think about it like a computer program update) and give it new directions to help you achieve your goals.

You need to integrate the two parts.

Use the [Integration of parts guided visualization](#).



PART IX WHAT TO EAT TO STOP BINGE EATING

By this point, the relationship with food often begins to feel different.

Not everything has resolved yet, but your inner environment has changed. There is more awareness, more capacity to pause, and less urgency driving decisions.

From here, food can begin to take on a new role.

FOOD AS STABILIZATION

This time let's look at food's physiological role.

Regular nourishment supports blood sugar balance, energy levels, and nervous system regulation. When the body is undernourished or inconsistent, urges intensify and emotional tolerance decreases.

Eating enough, and eating with some degree of regularity, creates a baseline of stability. This makes the work you have already done easier to access in daily life.

This is not about managing food carefully. It is about allowing food to support the system rather than disrupt it.

FINDING BALANCE

As we already discussed, you need to stop restrictive diets because they are the main reason for developing the restriction-binge cycle.

It's better for you if you start to eat a healthy balanced diet and move regularly to feel good, not to lose weight. You can find a balance when you eat and move the right amount for your own individual body. Not too much, not too little, just right. When you find this balance you will be able to sustain these healthy habits for a long time, stop bingeing and lose weight sustainably.

You'll know that you found this balance when your energy is stable, you don't feel constantly hungry, your cravings have reduced to a minimum, your mood is stable and you sleep well. So you listen to these biofeedback (hunger, energy, cravings, mood, sleep) from your body and

when any of these become out of balance, you tweak your diet and exercise routine a little bit. This is a quite advanced technique I teach my private clients but let's see the basics here.

When I tried to lose weight in my 20s I didn't care about the nutritional value of my food. All I cared about was how could I eat the least amount of calories. Of course, I was constantly hungry. Then I went home to my parents at the end of the week and I binged on all the yummy food my mum cooked. So I starved myself during the week and binged on the weekends. And my weight was slowly going up despite all the hunger during the week. My body was in survival mode and stored fat for the time when the "famine" came again and it didn't want to lose it because the famine always came.

Then I learned that if I eat healthy, balanced meals during the week my body gets all the calories and nutrients it needs and I'm not so hungry. Then I was able to eat normal portions from my mum's delicious food too. Sometimes I didn't even feel like eating dessert. (This was a difficult situation, as my mum likes to feed us and takes it as a personal insult if we don't eat a lot, but she got used to my new way of eating :-))

And I lost weight too.

For me, the key was adding protein and fats to my diet. When I wanted to lose weight I just ate fruits, vegetables, salads, rice cakes, rice, instant soups, sometimes some yogurt. And I exercised a lot too. No wonder I was so hungry all the time and thought about food constantly. I needed to balance my diet with some proteins and healthy fats.

BALANCED MEAL

Now you are probably wondering what a balanced meal looks like.

A balanced meal contains all the food groups, proteins, carbohydrates and fats.

A good starting point can be the [Eat Well Guide](#). Then you can adjust the ratio of the food groups as you listen to the biofeedback of your body. Some people feel better when they eat more carbohydrates, others when they eat more fat, or any other combinations. The main thing is that your meal contains whole foods in a proportion that makes you feel the best. You are not hungry until your next meal, you feel satiated, and you enjoy the food you eat.

vegetables until your tummy is really full. You'll feel full but will still crave food. Or you'll eat a large amount of healthy treat (because it's healthy and low calorie so you can eat a lot, right?) which will have more calories than a normal or small portion of the food you craved would have.

The worst part is that you don't even enjoy these foods. You are better off eating a normal portion of what you really want, so you don't feel deprived. Make sure you don't have a restrictive, dieting mindset. If you can have anything anytime, the formerly prohibited foods eventually will lose their allure and you won't be so drawn to them.

From a blood sugar perspective it's better to eat sweets after a meal as a dessert instead on an empty stomach. This way they won't spike your blood sugar, they won't make you feel hungry and out of control, and you'll be able to enjoy a normal portion of them.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR WEIGHT?

You might be worried about what happens to your weight if you let yourself eat your forbidden foods. If you were on a very restrictive diet and you were undereating you will probably gain a little bit of weight initially. But then your weight settles at your weight set-point.

If you've been overeating and binging a lot and gained some weight, you will eventually lose the extra weight and you will reach your weight set-point too.

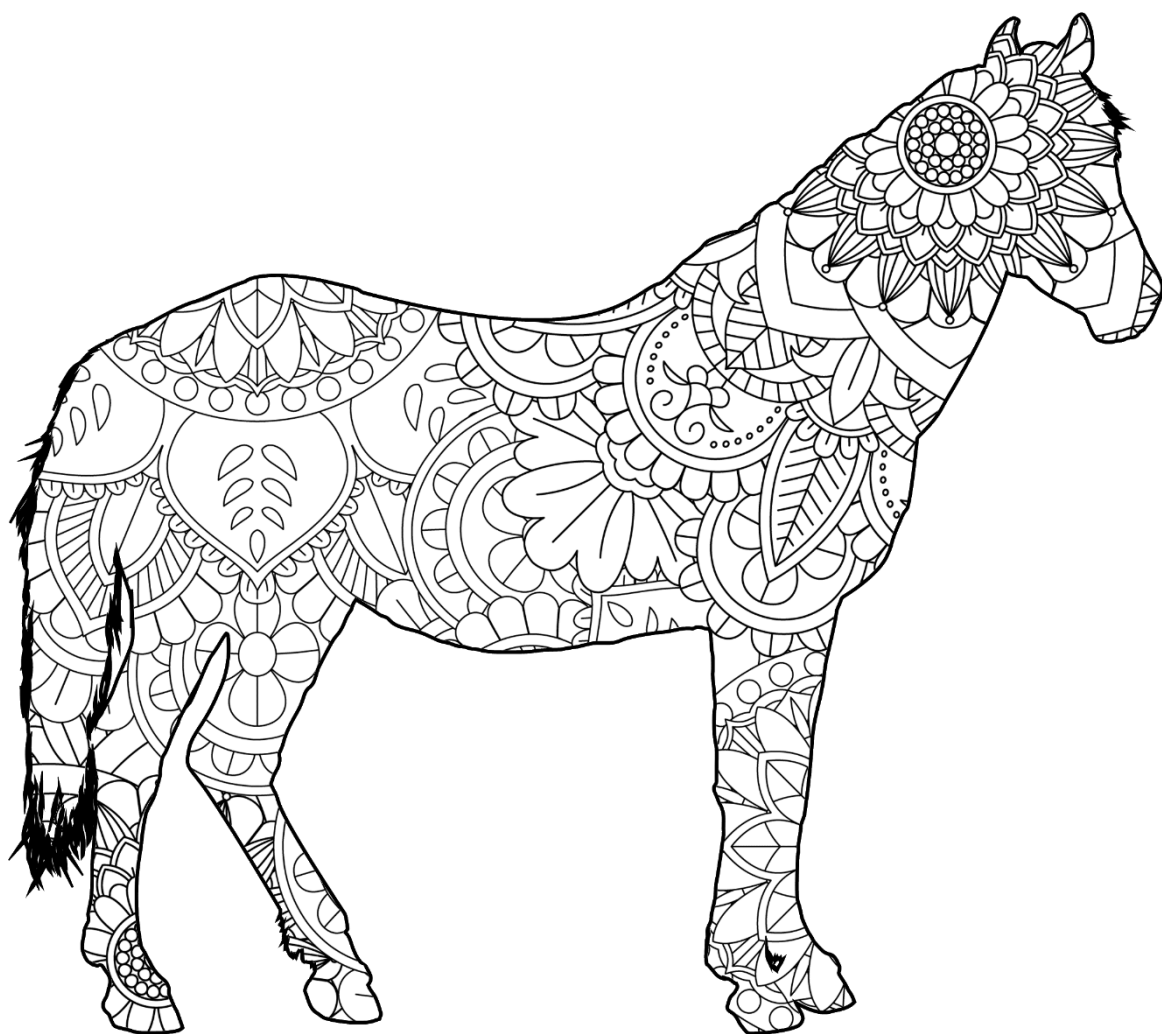
What is this mysterious weight set-point? It's a weight range where your body naturally likes to be. It's different for everyone and it depends on our genetics and environment/habits.

You can read more about it in this blog post:

[Are You Stuck At A Weight? How Can You Lower Your Weight Set-Point?](#)

You might think: *But Rita, I don't like your weight set point, that's why I started to diet at the first place!* In the blog post I also explained how you can lower your weight set point without falling back to the restrict-binge cycle.

Now let's see why and how to enjoy food more.



PART X MINDFUL EATING

I also want you to start taking the time to enjoy your food and savor each bite. Over time you will learn to enjoy the taste of the delicious food you are eating instead of eating fast without even noticing the taste.

You'll look forward to eating because you're hungry and the nourishing food you're about to eat looks and tastes amazing, not to release stress. With time you will notice when a non-food source of pleasure will soothe you better than another bowl of ice cream or another glass of wine. You will learn to enjoy food and will start to recognize when your body has had enough food.

The truth is, your amazing, clever body knows what and how much to eat and how to move to be healthy and in good shape, but it can't do its best when it constantly needs to deal with stress. Pleasure helps you move away from stress towards relaxation.

When we were babies we intrinsically knew how much to eat but later we lost this ability for different reasons. Maybe we had to clean our plates during childhood, maybe we restricted our food to lose weight and binged when we couldn't restrict anymore, or maybe we regularly ate too much to feel better. When you are in a relaxed state and listen to your body, it will start to give you the signals again.

The key is learning to get in tune with what your body needs and wants to feel great and be healthy.

Research shows that the body needs about 20 minutes to analyze the nutritional content of the food we eat. When it has received enough nourishment, it signals that it's full. When we eat too fast, we might eat too much before the body has a chance to notice that it has had enough nourishment already. Your stomach might be full but your brain still wants you to eat more because it has not registered the food you've already eaten yet.

MINDFUL EATING TO HELP CURB EMOTIONAL EATING

HOW DOES MINDFUL EATING HELP WITH EMOTIONAL EATING?

The reason mindful eating helps so much with emotional eating is that it helps you experience the food itself, not just use it to cover up your emotions.

With emotional eating, people tend to hurry up and eat as fast as possible, without really thinking about the food. You get into this state where you are in a hurry to just feel something else to cover up what you are trying to hide, which leads to a sense of unfulfillment both physically and emotionally.

With mindful eating, you are aware of your body the entire time, and understand when you are full or just no longer enjoying what you are eating. A big sign that you are eating emotionally that you can discover through mindful eating is that you keep eating even after the food no longer interests you and doesn't taste good anymore.

MINDFUL EATING CAN HELP YOU STOP BINGE EATING TOO

This might sound unbelievable, since a binge is driven by an overwhelming urge to eat as much food as possible, as fast as possible. This differentiates binge eating from simply overeating.

So how does this work? Use the "slow binging" technique.

THE "SLOW BINGING" TECHNIQUE

This is what you need to do: when you start binging, try to slow down as soon as you realize what's happening. I know it's hard but even a few seconds count.

Pause. Breathe. Even just one breath between bites will help.

You probably won't be able to stop eating, and that's okay. How much you eat isn't as important as getting back into a more mindful state instead of the unconscious, mindless eating state. You know, when it feels like a monster took over your body.

By practicing this technique every time you have a binge eating episode, over time you will get more effective at regaining control over your eating habit.

- You'll become more aware of why, where, and how you're bingeing (so it won't seem random, and eventually you can find solutions to prevent it).
- You'll likely eat less and stop sooner.
- You'll feel less panicked and powerless.
- You'll learn to soothe yourself more effectively using other ways than eating.

Don't be hard on yourself: if you forget to or can't slow down during one meal, just slow down next time, and notice what happens.

TIPS FOR STARTING SLOW AND MINDFUL EATING

While eating slowly and mindfully is simple and effective, it's not necessarily easy.

Mindful eating can seem a little overwhelming at first, but it really only takes one meal or snack a day to practice.

To start mindful eating, choose one meal a day that you focus on. Eat sitting down somewhere comfortable, set the table nicely, and eat without other distractions. This means not using your phone, not working while eating, and not watching anything on the TV.

Just sit and enjoy your meal, paying attention to each bite, from the flavor of the food to how it makes you feel. You can also focus on your thoughts at this time.

Try the tips below and experiment with them. Aim for a little bit better every time. Don't expect to do it perfectly the first time. If you have small children these tips may be more challenging. If that's the case, focus on working toward them and bringing as much presence to your eating as you can.

SAY A QUICK BLESSING BEFORE YOU EAT

Before you start eating say a blessing. Thank the food you are going to eat for providing the nourishment and energy to reach your goals.

You can also say: I love my food and my food loves me back.

If you are eating a piece of cake thank it for being delicious and giving you joy, then eat it very slowly and enjoy every bite of it.

DO SOMETHING BETWEEN BITES

Before you eat, pause. Take one breath. Go one bite, and one breath (or three) at a time.

Between bites, try:

- putting down your utensils
- taking a sip of water
- talking with someone at the table

INCREASE THE TIME GRADUALLY

Life is busy, and having long leisurely meals may feel impossible. So start small. Add just one minute per meal, then two, then three...

You can also try an app like 20 Minute Eating.

NO DISTRACTIONS

A lot of times, it can become easy to overeat when you're distracted.

Don't eat while you drive, watch TV, or play with your phone. Sit at a table, not on your living room couch, and definitely not standing in front of the fridge. Some of the biggest binges happen standing in front of the kitchen cupboards.

Try to relax and experience your meal.

It will be difficult at the beginning but try to stick to this at least one meal a day.

SAVOR YOUR FOODS AND DRINKS

The next step to good mindful eating habits is to focus on the meal.

Focus on how your food looks, what it's made of, and notice things about what you're eating. This will cause you to slow down and have control over how much you eat during your meal.

As you learn to savor the taste of the food, rather than shoveling it in and swallowing as quickly as possible, you will have an enjoyable experience that allows your body to chew and digest your food sufficiently.

Enjoy what you eat. Taste it.

Is it salty? Sweet? What flavors can you recognize? What's the texture like?

Practice chewing slowly, sniffing, and savoring your food at every bite.

Play a game of trying to identify all the ingredients of the dishes that you are eating.

If you cooked the meal and you know the ingredients try the following game instead. Imagine that you need to write about this food in a food connoisseur magazine. How would you describe it? What would you write about it?

Savor your drinks too.

Is it coffee, tea, wine, or a refreshing smoothie?

Before you take your first sip, pause. Smell your drink. What does it smell like? Taste it. What flavors do you taste against your tongue? What is the temperature like? Notice how the cup or glass feels in your hand as you take another sip. Swallow slowly and concentrate on how your muscles contract as your liquid travels down your esophagus.

USE SMALLER UTENSILS

Use smaller forks, smaller spoons, or even chopsticks. This will help you eat smaller bites and slow down.

EAT FOODS THAT NEED TO BE REALLY CHEWED

Fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and proteins require more chewing than highly processed cakes, chips, white bread, ice cream, etc.

The more you have to chew, the longer it'll take you to eat, giving your fullness signals a chance to catch up.

Choose more foods that you need to chew.

COUNT YOUR CHEWS

Chew your food very well and see if you can increase the number of chews. Count your chews,

turn it into a game.

“Chew your liquids. Drink your solids.” This is an old saying that means to enjoy your liquids so slowly as if you were eating/chewing them and to chew your solids until they are almost liquid.

Proper chewing not only slows down eating, but it also helps digestion, preventing digestive issues and making you less bloated.

Chewing breaks down the food into smaller pieces, mixes it with saliva, and increases the surface area of the food where the digestive enzymes can tackle it.

NOTICE WHAT AFFECTS YOUR EATING SPEED

Be a detective and try to figure out what affects your eating speed or focus.

Is it:

- who you eat with
- the time of the day
- the food you eat
- where you eat
- the music you hear (fast music makes you eat faster; listen to relaxing music during eating)?

Once you’ve made your observations, ask yourself: How could I change this situation? How could I improve my eating habits?

Find the slowest-eating person in your eating company and match their speed.

Every meal is a chance to practice.

WAIT 20 MINUTES BEFORE HAVING SECONDS

When it comes to eating seconds, a good rule to use is the 20 minutes rule. Science shows that it takes a few minutes for the brain to register that food has been eaten. If you have waited the full 20 minutes and you still feel hungry, you most likely are still hungry. If you got distracted and found some other ways to fill your time, then you might have wanted to eat for other reasons.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR THOUGHTS DURING SLOW, MINDFUL EATING

When you start practicing these new eating habits you might experience emotions and negative self-talk that you didn't pay attention to before.

For example, some may find that they watch TV during eating because eating alone makes them feel lonely. However, if eating in front of the TV results in overeating, it's better to deal with the feeling of loneliness using the tools we discussed in the previous chapters.

Others may find that they feel guilty if they take the time for themselves and for eating slowly. They may feel that they need to be productive all the time, even when they eat, so they check their emails, read a book, or continue working on their computer during mealtimes too. I definitely belong to this category.

But we deserve to take time for ourselves. We are more productive if we take proper breaks regularly. Besides, if we eat mindlessly, we get less pleasure from eating, and then we crave more food to get enough pleasure from eating.

PART XI THE POWER OF PLEASURE AND SELF-CARE

THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING STRESS

In part I explained how chronic stress causes not only emotional hunger but physical hunger too.

That's why in this section, you will learn a few strategies to reduce stress, take care of yourself, and include more pleasure in your life.

Stress management does not require removing challenges. It requires creating enough recovery and support so that challenges do not overwhelm the system.

STRESS RELIEF

When you are upset or angry about something, take a few deep breaths and ask these questions:

- Is this really important in the bigger picture of my life?
- Is it going to be important in 10 years; will I remember this at all?

Once you have calmed down ask yourself:

- What can I learn from this situation?
- What can I be grateful for about this?

KNOW WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

The Serenity Prayer above is used in the world of recovering from addiction.

When you take a slight step back and analyze the Serenity Prayer in chunks rather than as a whole, you'll realize just how inspirational this prayer really is. In fact, you can probably implement tiny aspects of this prayer into your daily life starting today!

- If you can make a change of some sort, then it's up to you to put in the time and effort to

make that change.

- When the situation is completely out of your hands, you need to be able to be okay with that and let the problem pass by.

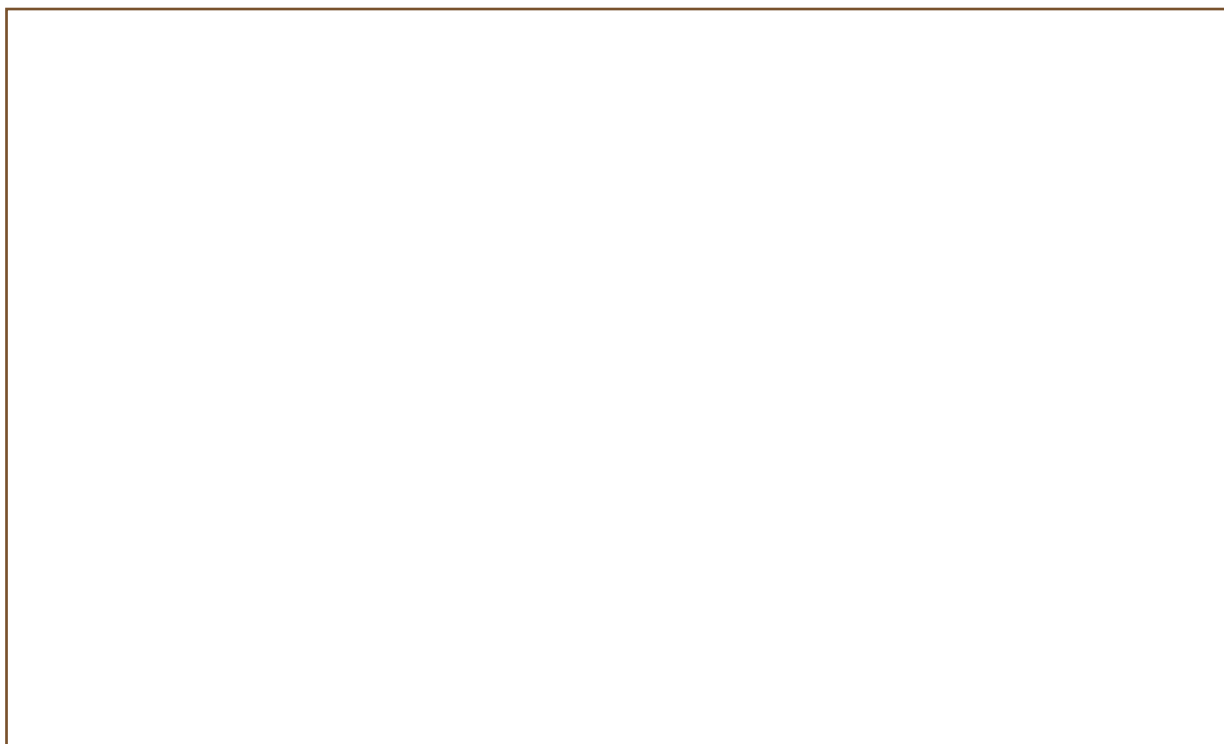
But, ultimately, you'll need to take the time to build the necessary insight to be able to determine whether you have a role in fixing the problem or not.

As much as you might hate to think about it, sometimes, in fact many times, things are just completely out of your control. In some cases, you might just have to leave the situation where it is and allow yourself to move on.

There's a lot of emotional and mental turmoil that can come with attempting to fix situations that you can't actually fix. Worrying about things you can't control also cause a lot of unnecessary stress. You might end up feeling like a failure or as if you're not good enough to repair the situation.

With a little work and commitment, you can easily depend on the Serenity Prayer to help get you through some of the most difficult events in your life.

Doing so will alleviate a lot of unnecessary worry and overwhelm and consequently lower your stress levels exponentially.



What can and can't you control in your life?

MANAGE YOUR TIME TO DECREASE STRESS

Time management is by far the best way to relieve stress while still accomplishing your goals and completing all of your responsibilities. When you feel like you have control over your day and know how to balance your time, you will naturally feel more at peace with your life and will not be as overwhelmed.

Below are a few techniques to improve your time management skills.

THE 80-20 RULE

The 80-20 rule is also known as the Pareto Principle. The idea is that 80 percent of your results are based on 20 percent of your efforts. In other words, if you have a to-do list with 10 items that you need to complete, two of them will result in more than all of the other eight items combined. When you identify which items are the crucial 20% for your results, you will dedicate your time and effort much more efficiently and will see greater outcomes.

TAKE SMART BREAKS

When people think about productivity, they often focus on completing as many tasks as possible in a given time. However, studies have shown that taking smart breaks and allowing buffers in your schedule can actually allow for more productivity and efficiency.

Managing your energy is as important or maybe even more important than managing your time.

I wrote a whole series of articles about managing your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energy for the Expert Profile magazine. [You can read them here.](#)

CONTROL SOCIAL MEDIA USE

When you have all of your notifications on for each of your different social media platforms and they are constantly going off while you are trying to focus on a task, you would be surprised by the amount of time and energy they take away. Even just looking at your phone for a second can totally distract you and take your train of thought away. Switch off the notification and you will be able to focus on your tasks much more effectively.

TO-DO LISTS

Making organized to-do lists is a great way to keep yourself accountable for the tasks you have to get done and make you feel productive as you check things off. In addition, writing everything you have to do on a piece of paper allows your mind to focus on the task in front of you rather than trying to remember everything else that you have to do.

Write down the things you have to do and identify what is the most important and what you can save for later. Having an order of importance is a great way to feel rewarded at the end of the day as you completed the most valuable tasks. This will also reduce your urge to only get the small and easy tasks done and procrastinate on the more important things.

USE TIMERS

Timers are a great way to stay productive and efficient in a given time. For example, if you set a

timer for a half an hour to complete a task and put your phone in another room, you will likely get a lot more done than if you are constantly surrounded by the distractions. Timers also provide a sense of reward as you have a break to look forward to while you are completing your tasks.

HAVE MORE JOY AND HAPPINESS IN YOUR LIFE

Do something, other than eating, that gives you joy and happiness for at least 10 minutes every day. That's the minimum for those days when you are very busy. If you can, I urge you to carve out more time for your self-care practices.

These can be simple things like reading a book, drinking a cup of tea while watching the birds outside, listening to your favorite music, playing with your children or pets, painting your nails, painting a picture, watching a film, having a bath, meditating, doing yoga, going for a walk, cuddling, kissing, having sex, taking a nap or any other pleasurable experiences you can think of.

Or it can be something that needs a bit more preparation, such as having a coffee with friends, traveling, going to a concert, a spa treatment, massage, etc. Anything that relaxes you, calms you down, and gives you joy will work.

Walking is one of the healthiest things you can do and a leisurely walk, especially if it's done in nature, lowers cortisol.

Put these relaxation activities into your calendar and stick to them. Treat them like you would an important meeting. Make them happen.

Recovery is extremely important for mental and physical health. When you schedule these relaxation activities, your unconscious mind will not force you to take time out. Sometimes we eat because we just need a break from work, stress, and life in general; we want to release tension, zone out, not think, and just relax.

You must learn to chill out.

What pleasurable activities and relaxation exercises are you going to schedule for this week?

Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

Use the Self-Care Tracker printable to plan and track your self-care activities.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU EXPERIENCED JOY?

Most of us have moments where we feel happy. We look at our children and their laughter makes us smile. We go and enjoy a holiday with friends and family. Maybe we read a good book, watch a good film or have a date night with our spouse. However, when was the last time you experienced pure joy?

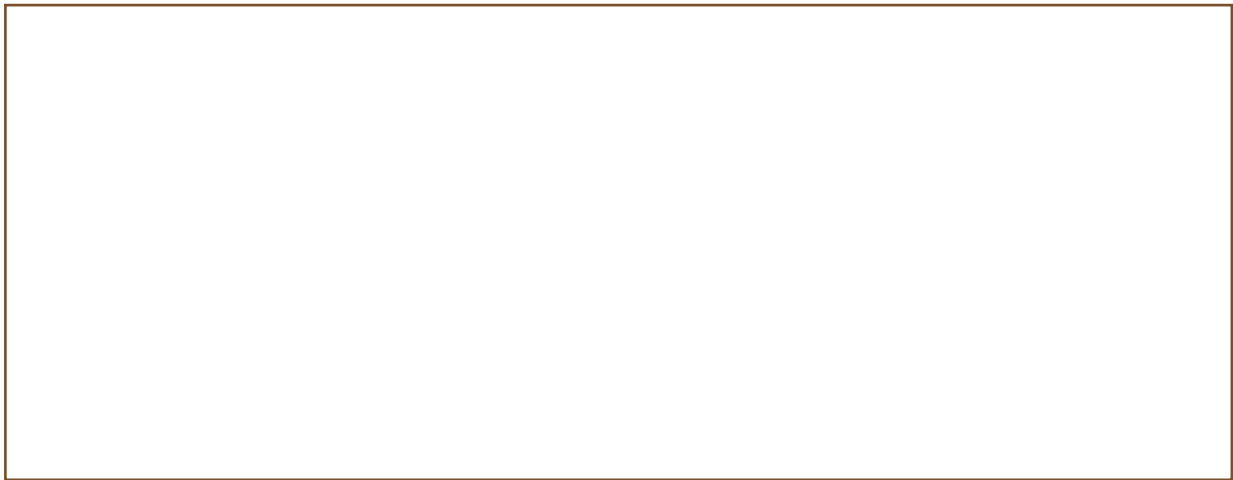
Pure joy is that feeling you felt as a child when you were anticipating opening the presents under the Christmas tree as you woke up on Christmas morning. It is the feeling you felt as a child when you were faced with what seemed to be the biggest ice cream you had ever seen. Do you remember feeling the excitement as you waited for the gates to open at a favorite theme park?

As we grow older, we lose the sense of pure joy that captivates a child's mind. We rarely let ourselves enjoy our activities with the reckless abandon we did as children. Perhaps the closest we come to that joy is the moment we gaze in awe at our newly born baby.

As adults, the responsibilities of our lives rob us of simple pleasures that give us joy. The

experiences that shaped our personalities have their roots in our childhood and spending time reflecting on them is an excellent way to guide our thinking as we try to rediscover the inner self.

Write down 5 childhood memories that you remember gave you feelings of deep joy and excitement, both as you anticipated them, and later as you experienced them. Then take time to **go and explore and relive these adventures.**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin brown border, intended for the user to write down their childhood memories.

PART XII INTEGRATION AND FUTURE

This final part of the workbook is about integration.

Integration is the process of allowing what you have learned and experienced to settle into daily life. It does not require effort or intensity. It happens through repetition, context, and time.

Change that lasts is rarely dramatic. It shows up quietly, in how you respond to yourself, how you relate to stress, and how much space exists between experience and action.

SELF-CARE AS SYSTEM SUPPORT

Rest, movement, creative expression, time away from pressure, and emotional connection all contribute to nervous system regulation. When these elements are present, eating patterns tend to stabilize naturally.

Rather than asking what you should add or fix, it can be helpful to notice what already helps you feel more grounded. Strengthening what works creates continuity.

WORKING WITH STRESS OVER TIME

Stress will continue to be part of life.

What changes is your relationship to it.

As awareness and regulation become more familiar, stress signals are noticed earlier. This allows for gentler responses and prevents accumulation.

WHEN OLD PATTERNS REAPPEAR

Moments of return are part of any change process.

An urge may feel stronger than expected. A familiar pattern may resurface during a demanding period. This does not mean progress has been lost.

Each return offers information.

Approaching these moments with reflection rather than judgment keeps you oriented toward learning rather than defense. Over time, the duration and intensity of these episodes tend to decrease.

LIVING FROM A DIFFERENT IDENTITY

As identity shifts from an emotional eater or binge eater to a “normal” eater, behavior follows.

You may notice that food occupies less mental space. Decisions feel simpler. Recovery from stress happens more quickly.

This does not mean challenges disappear. It means they are met from a different position.

Living from this orientation is not something you maintain through vigilance. It becomes familiar through experience.

WHEN SUPPORT BECOMES HELPFUL

Some layers of change unfold well through self-paced work. Others benefit from relational support.

Having guidance, reflection, and accountability can help integrate this work more deeply, especially when old beliefs or patterns resurface under pressure.

This is not a requirement. It is an option.

If you choose to continue, deeper support offers a container for personalization, pacing, and sustained integration over time. (See details in the next chapter.)

FINAL CHECKPOINT

Take a moment to reflect on this question:

“What feels different about how I relate to myself now?”

The work you have done here does not end with this page. It continues in how you live, respond, and lead yourself forward.

Congratulations on finishing the workbook! You are amazing!

PART XIII ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I'm a Nutrition and Diet Advisor, Health Coach and Life Coach, specializing in helping you break free from your food issues such as overeating, emotional eating, binge eating, food obsession, yo-yo dieting and body image issues, and develop a healthy relationship with food. If you already have a healthy relationship with food but have extra weight, I can help you lose it without dieting and developing the above issues.

FURTHER SUPPORT FROM ME

If you want

- my personal undivided attention
- to guide you through this process step-by-step,
- answer your questions,
- help you through the messy middle when old patterns resurface,
- provide safety when deeper layers emerge and
- keep you accountable to actually do the exercises instead of just letting the workbook collect digital dust,

book a complimentary consultation [here](#), let's have a virtual coffee or tea and a chat together. During this FREE call you'll tell me about your specific issue, and we'll map out a plan to help you get free from your issue. If you can't find a suitable time in the calendar, send me an email at hello@ritamayblog.com.

There are three more ways I can help you:

- We can have laser- focused 30-minute calls or email support, for when you just want to clarify something you read in the book or you need help with a smaller issue.
- The second option is an initial 90-minute call to get you started. If you choose this option, we'll create a personalized strategy for you to follow, based on your unique circumstances. You'll get additional video lessons too.
- The third option is a 3-month coaching package. If you decide to sign up, we'll meet weekly, and I'll guide you through the steps we mapped out during the first call. This package is highly personalized, I'll answer all your questions, and we'll focus on the areas that are most relevant for you. We'll keep in touch during the week via email or Voxer too and I'll help you tackle all the mindset issues that usually arise during the process. These mindset hurdles are responsible for the many failed attempts when people try to do this on their own. Book a free call [here](#).

You can also find me here:

[Website](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Pinterest](#)

[Facebook](#)

If you have questions about these offers, please send me an email at:

hello@ritamayblog.com

I look forward to speaking with you,

Rita