



HOW IS FOOD MAKING YOU FEEL TODAY?

Managing emotional eating during
uncertain times



During this time, you may be feeling a range of different emotions and you might notice that your eating patterns have changed because of this. This is ok.

Your **feelings are valid** and you have permission to **nourish your body**.

While some people lose their appetite when they are stressed, many of us will eat more - a natural response to the stress hormone cortisol. **We are also biologically wired to find eating pleasurable.** Food can trigger the release of 'feel good' chemicals in our brain, so it makes sense that food becomes a natural antidote to unpleasant feelings such as worry, grief, sadness, or stress.

However, when food is our only coping strategy, it often backfires.

Eating to calm our nerves or provide some pleasure on a dreary day is okay. You are the best judge of whether your eating habits are helping or hindering you. Remember, we are dealing with a global pandemic - **there is no right or wrong way to feel and there is no right or wrong way to be eating.**

If your eating patterns feel like they aren't working for you, the best place to start is with some self-reflection. **Increase your awareness of patterns, behaviours, and triggers for your eating.** Are there particular emotions, people, or times of day when you find yourself turning to food more often?

The tips below may be helpful in creating eating patterns that feel good to you.

Nourish Yourself

AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT IT

Make sure you are eating enough food throughout the day



Food and eating is a form of self-care. Providing your body with adequate nutrition is the first step in managing emotional eating. It is especially important during times of stress and uncertainty to keep our mood, energy, and body functioning at its best. When we don't meet our body's needs, we may find ourselves eating more than we feel is necessary as well as feeling out of control around food. This is a natural response to our body feeling deprived.

Regular balanced meals



Our bodies thrive on routine. Not only does eating regular meals and snacks provide structure to our days (which can be so helpful right now!), but it also makes sure our bodies are being fuelled consistently so we can do all the things that are important and meaningful to us. Eating every 3-5 hours works best for most people and can help you avoid feelings of extreme hunger or being stuffed. Focus on nourishing your body with a balance of foods that are nutritious and satisfying to you at regular times of the day. This formula is a good guideline to focus on at meals: **carbohydrates + protein + vegetable/fruit**. Don't be afraid to include some feel good comfort foods in the mix as well. All foods serve a purpose. You may find yourself having less cravings when you are eating consistently and including variety.

Prioritize, don't perfect



Dietary perfection isn't necessary - now or ever. An all or nothing approach rarely works in the long run and adding more stress to your day by focusing on each bite you take is not what you need right now. In a time when we may be experiencing more stress, financial struggles, and trying to do groceries less often - now is the time to prioritize the basics. Get back into the kitchen and cook a homemade meal, share it with your family (virtually if you live alone!), and don't overthink it. Fresh, frozen, or canned - it doesn't matter. The most important thing is that you are eating regularly and including as much variety and balance as you can.

Be curious & show yourself some compassion



Take a moment to be curious and ask yourself why you are eating. Ask yourself, 'How am I feeling in this moment?', 'Am I hungry?', 'Will eating make me feel better?'. These questions are not meant to be judgemental, but to help you identify your emotions, what you need, and what would truly be most helpful in meeting those needs. Self-compassion is also important when it comes to eating. Feelings of guilt, shame, or anger towards yourself can actually perpetuate emotional eating and start a vicious cycle. Instead show yourself love and kindness.

Explore other coping strategies & sources of pleasure



There is nothing wrong with emotional eating. However, it can be helpful to have a toolbox full of coping strategies rather than depending on food all the time. **When a craving doesn't come from hunger, food will never completely satisfy it.** Eating provides a distraction or a comfort, but it is temporary. Identify your true feelings and how best to meet those needs. That might mean taking a walk, talking to a friend, taking a break from the news, or enjoying some chocolate - it all depends on what is going to make you truly feel better.

Need more support? Reach out to your dietitian.