

BINGE-EATING & EMOTIONAL-EATING TOOLKIT

The Food Therapy Clinic



WHAT IS BINGE-EATING?

I have worked with many clients who come to me nervous and embarrassed even to use the words "binge". They have a sense that they sometimes feel out of control around food and they know that they are over-eating from time to time. Yet often they are not sure whether what they are doing would be categorised as binge-eating.

Now firstly, as a psychotherapist and nutritionist - I have noticed that binge-eating is incredibly common. So if this is something that you are or have been struggling with - there is nothing to be embarrassed about at all. You probably don't realise just how common binge-eating is because it is something that people tend to do in secret and not discuss with friends/family members.

So what is binge-eating? Well for some it is something that they only experience from time-to-time and for others it becomes a habit that shows up more regularly. When it presents more regularly - it can cause someone to fall under the diagnosis of a condition called Binge Eating Disorder or BED. BED was only recognised as an eating disorder in 2013.

IN THIS TOOLKIT

WHAT ARE BINGE-EATING AND EMOTIONAL-EATING

HOW TO TELL IF YOU ARE BINGE-EATING OR EMOTIONAL-EATING

WHY DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THESE EATING PATTERNS?

SOME TOOLS TO MANAGE THESE EATING PATTERNS

THE DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR BED

Criteria 1: Recurrent episodes of binge eating. An episode of binge eating is characterised by both of the following:

- (i) Eating, in a discrete period of time (e.g. within any 2-hour period), an amount of food that is larger than most people would eat in a similar period of time under similar circumstances.
- (ii) The sense of lack of control over eating during the episode (e.g. a feeling that one cannot stop eating or control what or how much one is eating)

Criteria 2: Binge-eating episodes are associated with three (or more) of the following:

- (i) Eating much more rapidly than normal
- (ii) Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- (iii) Eating large amounts of food when not feeling physically hungry
- (iv) Eating alone because of being embarrassed by how much one is eating
- (v) Feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty after overeating

Criteria 3: Marked distress regarding binge eating is present

Criteria 4: The binge eating occurs, on average,

- (i) at least 2 days a week for 6 months (DSM-IV frequency and duration criteria)
- (ii) at least 1 day a week for 3 months (DSM-5 frequency and duration criteria)

Criteria 5: The binge eating is not associated with the regular use of inappropriate compensatory behaviour (e.g., purging, fasting, excessive exercise) and does not occur exclusively during the course of anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. (If this criteria is not met and an individual is over-exercising, starving themselves or purging to compensate for the binges, then a diagnosis of bulimia may be more appropriate instead).



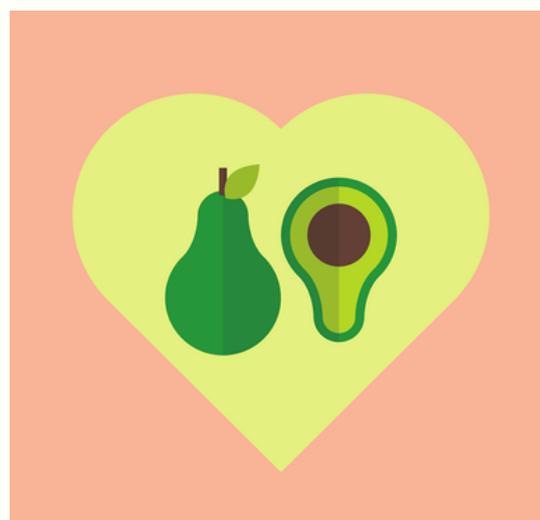
Many of the clients that I work with satisfy all of the criteria above. However, many of them don't satisfy criteria 4 - so they only binge once every now and again or twice a month - and yet the psychological damage that this does to them is significant. Yet they all tend to describe to me feeling strong impulses to eat and buy food that they can't control and a feeling of being on autopilot or like a robot - it is almost as though it isn't them making those food choices. Nobody should have to suffer with the psychological torment of feeling guilty after eating - and nobody should have to struggle with feeling so out of control around food. If you have read through this list of criteria and felt that some or all of them may apply to you - then please know that this is something that can be treated and that you can feel much better and much more in control.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL-EATING?

Emotional eating is not an official term, however it describes eating food in response to emotional triggers rather than feelings of physical hunger. The emotional triggers that often cause many of my clients to turn to food can include boredom, sadness, anger, stress, frustration, loneliness, anxiety and confusion. Most of us will turn to food as a source of comfort from time to time. However if someone is using food as the only or primary coping mechanism for dealing with their negative emotions, then long-term, this can have a very detrimental effect on their physical and mental health. If someone has no other tools to manage their emotions, then they may end up turning to food for comfort very regularly.

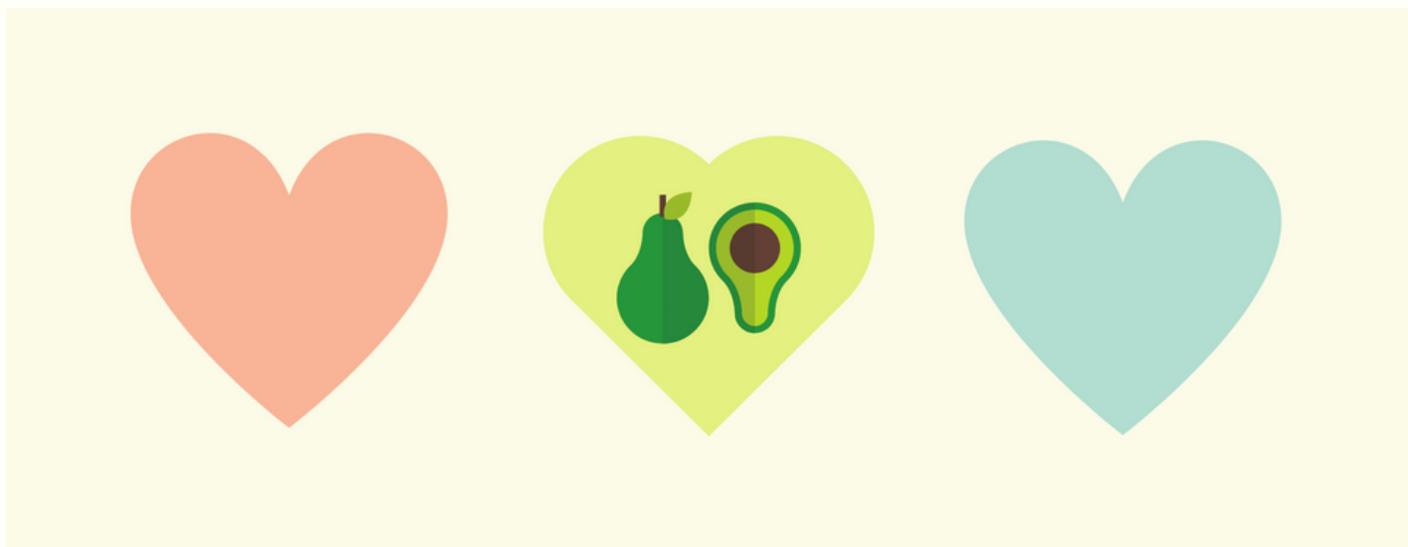
Some questions you can work through to determine whether you are experiencing physical hunger or hunger for emotional reasons can include the following:

1. Do you have a sudden urge to eat – often after something has happened, someone has said something or you think a negative thought? – this is often emotional hunger, physical hunger will usually present itself more gradually.
2. Do you feel hungry despite having just eaten a good meal not long ago or once you start eating do you find that you can't stop? – often emotional hunger can persist despite you eating lots of food. So you may notice that even though you have eaten just recently or that after you eat, you still want more and more... to try and numb that emotion/ satisfy that boredom.
3. Do you crave very specific and often very unhealthy or sugary foods? This is usually emotional hunger, because you want these foods for the quick rush they will give you rather than for nourishment.
4. Are you eating the food as a “reward” or “treat” or something you feel that you deserve for some precious “me-time”? These are often forms of emotional eating rather than driven by physical hunger. Of course, you can treat yourself to a delicious and nourishing meal (and I would encourage you to do so!) but very often when you are looking at unhealthy food as a “treat” you are eating it because you feel you deserve it after dealing with some emotion whether that is stress, sadness, anxiety or something else.
5. Do you feel the hunger in your stomach or perhaps did you hear your stomach grumble? This is physical hunger – it starts in your stomach.



Many of the clients that I work with turn to food to numb away the emotions that they are experiencing. However the food only ever provides temporary relief - and once they have eaten a bit of food, they may be left craving even more to continue numbing away how they are feeling. Emotional eating can also trigger feelings of guilt or shame, which can also have a very negative impact on an individual's mental health.

WHY DO PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THESE EATING PATTERNS?



WHY ARE YOU BINGE-EATING?

I am often asked by clients what has caused their binge-eating. Of course, a range of factors play a role in whether someone develops binge-eating or bulimia. Yet for many individuals, binge-eating or bulimia starts after a period of extreme dieting or after following some form of restrictive meal plan. There is a part of the brain that responds to this starvation/restriction by encouraging an individual to eat...and eat...and eat...and eat. It is quite a primitive drive and its purpose is of course, to protect the body against starvation. Eventually an individual comes to enjoy the feel good hormones that are released through the process of binge-eating and the more times they engage in this behaviour - it slowly forms into a habit or an automatic response in certain circumstances.

The types of circumstances that may make an individual feel more inclined to binge eat include when they have eaten a food that they deem "naughty" or "bad". When they are feeling a bit full from slightly over-eating, they may then be tempted to binge. When they have starved themselves all day and are feeling extremely hungry in the evening, they may also then be tempted to binge. Again - the more times they turn to binge-eating in these circumstances - the more they hard-wire their brain to automatically turn to binge-eating going forward.

However, the good news is that a range of techniques can be used to break unhelpful subconscious habits down and to reverse the pattern of binge-eating. Just as habits can be formed - they can also be unlearned - and new, healthier habits established in their place. In addition, there is a part of our brain (the pre-frontal cortex) that acts like a filter on our automatic habits - allowing us to decide whether we act upon those instinctive urges and also enabling us to consciously start building up new habits.

WHY ARE YOU EMOTIONAL-EATING?

Very often the pattern of eating to soothe how we are feeling develops early in our life. We may have been given treats in our childhood as a reward or when we were feeling down, or we may have gone through a difficult time in early-adulthood in which food became our source of comfort. Certain foods, particularly sugary foods, light-up pathways in a part of our brain called the nucleus accumbens - which makes eating them feel really good. So over time we teach ourselves that we feel really good when we eat certain foods and we then turn to those foods anytime we want a quick high or a way to make ourselves feel better.

The likelihood of us turning to food for comfort is higher if we have no other way of coping with our emotions. It is why when I work with clients I am often helping them to develop new and healthier coping mechanisms for them to use when they are emotionally triggered. Often coping mechanisms such as smoking, drinking alcohol or eating are also not effective long-term at helping someone manage how they are feeling. These coping mechanisms really just act to suppress or numb how an individual is feeling rather than helping them work through, process and understand their emotions - which long-term has much better outcomes. The problem with numbing emotions with things like food and alcohol is that once you start that numbing process, you won't want to stop - as soon as the effects of the alcohol or sugar wear off, you will want more to keep that numbing effect going.

I have created an 8 week online programme to treat binge-eating and over-eating, here are what some of my clients are saying about the programme and method:

"I love this programme I honestly do. It's the first thing I've come across like it though. It feels like a secret from general society...I have now finished week 6 and have found this so helpful. I absolutely love the way you explain things that makes so much sense and I really feel I can get onboard with the advice". - Client, Binge Eating Treatment Programme

"I just wanted to let you know I think your programme is helping me already...I haven't binged in a week. I was also able to do a Zumba class this morning with more energy than in a long time so thank you ."

- Client email one week into the online programme



"I've just finished week 4 of the programme and I am feeling really good! I feel much more in control of my eating and am enjoying the new challenge of cooking healthy, nourishing food. I also have a much better understanding of the root causes and triggers for my disordered eating."

- Client after completing 4 weeks of the online programme

"I have now lost two stone and feel so much better for it. I really think that it's going to continue and stay off...My team at work can't believe how much I have changed! I now have a desk full of fruit and nuts and no biscuits and chocolate in sight."

- Journalist, Your Healthy Living Magazine

SOME TOOLS TO START MANAGING BINGE-EATING AND EMOTIONAL-EATING

1 START IDENTIFYING YOUR "BINGE EXCUSES"

When you are contemplating bingeing or over-eating, your brain may come up with some excuses to help you to justify bingeing or over-eating in that moment. It can help to start identifying what those excuses are and then to think of some strong counter-arguments you can turn to in that moment.

Some examples of your excuses may include:

- *"I will be "good" from tomorrow so I might as well have what I want right now"*
- *"I have so much weight to lose that there is no point in even trying to eat healthily"*
- *"I might as well eat all of the food now so that there is none left for tomorrow"*

2 FIND OTHER HELPFUL WAYS TO COPE WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

If food is your go-to when you feel down, stressed or sad, you can start to think about other things that may help you when you feel these emotions. *For example, does it help instead for you to talk things through with a friend or to take a hot bath when you feel stressed?*

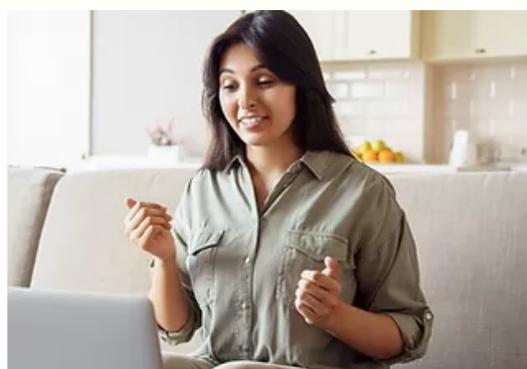
3 RECOGNISE THAT YOUR THOUGHTS ARE NOT FACTS

We often assume that everything running through our mind is a fact or real. This can have several consequences. Firstly, when we have the thought or idea of over-eating on some food, we assume that we have to act on that thought. However it is powerful to recognise that thoughts alone can't hurt us. Just because you think you "should eat" something, it doesn't mean you have to act on this thought. Similarly, when it comes to us feeling stressed, sad or down, we often feel this way because we think that all of the things running through our mind are true - when in fact, often our mind is just making up unhelpful stories about a situation. *For example, our mind may make up unhelpful stories by always jumping to the worse-case-scenario in a situation - making us think that something "bad" is going to happen and then feeling down and anxious as a result.*

4 HYPNOTHERAPY/ RELAXATION

Hypnotherapy and other relaxation techniques such as meditation can be really helpful for managing stress, anxiety and low mood (and are therefore great alternative coping mechanisms to food). Hypnotherapy is also a very powerful tool for changing unhelpful habits and can therefore help to stop patterns of binge-eating or emotional-eating and build new healthier habits in their place.

There are lots of tools to manage binge-eating and emotional-eating in my 8 week online programme to treat binge-eating along with practical steps to implement these tools effectively. The online programme also contains videos for you to watch, hypnotherapy recordings to listen to, workbooks to complete and much more. Find out more about the programme at www.thefoodtherapyclinic.com.



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