



Module Six

FOOD & MOOD





TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ▶ 3 INTRODUCTION
- ▶ 4 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FOOD & MOOD
- ▶ 6 EMOTIONAL EATING
- ▶ 9 HOW FOOD AFFECTS OUR MOOD
- ▶ 10 BREAK FREE FROM EMOTIONAL EATING
- ▶ 12 INTUITIVE EATING
- ▶ 16 HOMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

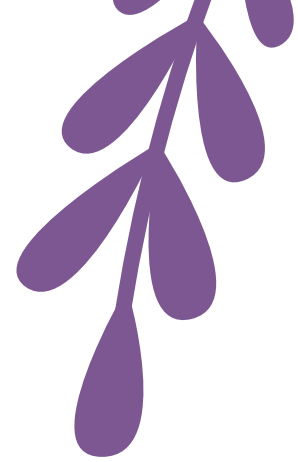
In this module, we're going to explore the connection between food and mood.. Because food isn't just about nutrition - it's a mental and emotional experience as well. At its best, food fills us with joy and appreciation alongside the nutritional building blocks our bodies need to thrive. But we've all experienced times when we turn to food for comfort.

We aren't physically hungry - we're emotionally overwhelmed by stress, anxiety, anger, or sadness. In return, we turn to food to soothe those emotions and alleviate that stress. This is called emotional eating. It's a very human thing to do. It only becomes a problem when the foods we choose - or the quantity - leave us feeling worse instead of better.

Let's explore those connections more, and then I've got some specific strategies to help you curb emotional eating and eat more mindfully.

Let's dive in!

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FOOD & MOOD



There are biological reasons why so many people eat when stressed or dealing with strong emotions.

When a person is physically or emotionally stressed, the body releases a hormone called cortisol. Cortisol does a lot of things, including increasing food cravings for foods high in sugar or fat. Stress also increases the hormones that produce feelings of hunger.

With autoimmune disease, emotional eating has an added complexity. If the foods chosen are inflammatory, autoimmune flares may follow, turning short-term comfort into longer-lasting pain.

This often leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and self-judgment, which can drive more emotional eating, creating a vicious cycle. If you find yourself caught in this pattern, you aren't alone.

Stress makes it much more like that you will:

Experience hunger even though you've already had plenty to eat. Eating when your body doesn't need food increases the chance of unintentional weight gain, which can negatively affect your health.

- Just because you're hungry doesn't mean you should eat. Hunger is a signal that you should consider eating. So, consider it. But if you've already had enough to eat, make the decision to pass.
- In addition, our hunger cues are not as clear-cut as we think they are. A lot of times what we think is hunger is actually just thirst. Eating water-rich foods like vegetables, fruits, and soups may help tackle both thirst and hunger cues for longer periods of time.
- Alternatively, make sure you're actually staying hydrated. Make sure you're drinking eight, 8-ounce glasses of water a day.

Eat when you're not hungry. If eating makes you feel better, your brain doesn't care if you're hungry or not. It will make eating seem like a great idea. Unfortunately, eating when your body doesn't need food leads to weight gain, which contributes to the development of many diseases.

Eat unhealthy foods. Under stress, many people will resort to eating all sorts of things they know they shouldn't eat. Chips, ice cream, processed meats, sweets, and other unhealthy foods suddenly become even more appealing than they usually are.

Eat too much. Eating while stressed is likely to result in overeating. And not only do you eat too much, but you're likely to be eating unhealthy foods.

Eat in a way that makes you feel even worse. If you're eating when your body doesn't need food, and you're eating foods that aren't good for you, you're almost certainly going to feel worse after you eat than you felt before you started.

Eat mindlessly in general. Stress takes your mind off the eating experience. You're more likely to find yourself eating while watching TV, watching YouTube videos, thinking about whatever is causing you stress, or daydreaming.

STRESS IS A PART OF LIFE NOW MORE THAN EVER. IT'S EASY TO ALLOW YOUR EATING PATTERNS TO GET OUT OF CONTROL WHEN YOU'RE STRESSED. YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO CRAVE UNHEALTHY FOODS OR EAT WHEN YOU'RE NOT EVEN HUNGRY. STRESS AND POOR EATING HABITS ARE STRONGLY LINKED.



EMOTIONAL EATING

Experts believe that up to 75% of overeating may be due to reasons other than physical hunger. If you want to improve your relationship with food, learn to identify and control emotional eating.

Recognize the Signs

Understand how emotional eating works. Emotional eating occurs when you use food to manage your feelings, rather than to satisfy your hunger. This can trigger guilt and create a cycle where you eat because you feel bad and feel bad because you eat. Positive feelings can also play a role if you associate food with celebrating.

Keep a balanced perspective. It's okay to take pleasure in food and enjoy sharing it with others. Concerns arise only when emotional eating interferes with your health and well being.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Food has a big impact on our mental and emotional well being. For many people, food is also associated with certain memories and emotions. Complete the following to explore how food and mood are related in your life.

When you think of your childhood, what role did food play in your family?

Write about any memories you have related to eating/food and love or nurturing.

Write about any negative associations you have with food, ie. bad memories.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

If you use food to manage your emotions, what specific foods do you use:

For sadness?

For anger?

For fear?

For stress/anxiety?

When you're tired?



HOW FOOD AFFECTS OUR MOOD

Just as a car runs best on clean, high-quality fuel, your brain runs best when it's fed properly. A low-quality diet doesn't just create and contribute to physical health issues, it can also create and contribute to brain-related issues that influence your mood.

Here's how food can have a major impact on your mood:

Serotonin is produced primarily in the gut. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that's involved in regulating appetite, sleep, pain inhibition, and the mediation of moods.

- The hundreds of millions of neurons in the intestinal tract are influenced by the serotonin produced in the gut. It's believed that 95% of serotonin is produced in the gut.

The bacteria in your gut are an important influencer of your mood.

The good bacteria in your gut help to protect you from the bad bacteria. They help to properly seal the interior of your intestinal tract from the rest of your body.

- They also help to control inflammation throughout the body.
- They even affect the neural pathways between your brain and your gut.

A diet high in processed food increases the likelihood of depression by as much as 35%.

Areas of the world that eat minimal amounts of processed foods have a far lower incidence of depression. It's likely that there are other psychological issues that are influenced by diet.



DEVELOP A HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

Liberating yourself from emotional eating will help you protect your health and enjoy your food more.

These methods will help put you back in control.

Ask yourself if you feel out of control. You may have lost control of your eating habits if you want to make healthier choices but keep backsliding. Be honest with yourself if you resolve to have yogurt for breakfast but wind up stopping off for a bacon sandwich on the way to work.

Notice your cravings. A strong desire for specific dishes is a common symptom of emotional eating. If you're actually hungry, everything on the menu is likely to sound appealing. When you're depressed over a recent breakup, ice cream may be the only thing you want to order.

Assess your hunger. Are you really hungry? Take an objective look at your hunger. Did you eat recently? Have you been engaged in a lot of physical activity since you last ate? Do you actually feel hungry, or do you just have the urge to eat? Have you drunk enough water?

Consider your family history. The way you eat may be grounded in patterns that started in childhood. Maybe you were rewarded with a homemade cake when you got good grades.

Eat slowly. One of the most effective ways to avoid overeating is to eat slowly. Very slowly. Decide that you're going to take small bites and chew ridiculously slowly. Chew your food at least 30 times. Take a small drink of water between each bite.

Develop positive coping techniques. Comfort foods deliver only short-term relief. Find more effective methods for managing daily stress, such as meditation, music, physical exercise (such as walking), or calling a friend.



Avoid temptation. If you find your favorite cookies to be too irresistible, banish them from your pantry. Choose restaurants that specialize in grilled fish if you have trouble declining fried chicken.

Get adequate sleep. Being chronically tired makes you more vulnerable to overeating. Aim for 8 hours of sleep every night. Take a warm bath before bed to raise your body temperature if you have trouble falling asleep.

Reward your good behavior. Reinforce the positive changes you make in your behavior. Set realistic goals and praise yourself when you attain them. Buy yourself something special or visit your favorite park or museum.

Emotional eating is very common, but that doesn't mean you have to allow stress to affect the way you eat.

Which strategy will you start with this week, to begin to control or tame emotional eating?





WHAT IS INTUITIVE EATING?

“LISTEN FOR THE BODY SIGNALS THAT TELL YOU THAT YOU ARE NO LONGER HUNGRY. OBSERVE THE SIGNS THAT SHOW THAT YOU’RE COMFORTABLY FULL. PAUSE IN THE MIDDLE OF A MEAL OR SNACK AND ASK YOURSELF HOW THE FOOD TASTES, AND WHAT YOUR CURRENT FULLNESS LEVEL IS.”

- EVELYN TRIBOLE

Intuitive eating is a framework of eating that helps people learn to trust their body’s signals. To become more in tune with your hunger as well as your fullness, and also understand the choices you make outside of those signals.

Intuitive eating empowers people to choose foods consciously. However, practicing it while chronically ill can be a bit more complicated since certain foods can trigger symptoms and medications can also mask natural hunger cues.

Focus on eating when and what feels best and most supportive to your body. But keep in mind that these foods can always change over time.

TIPS FOR PRACTICING INTUITIVE EATING

Hunger. Honor your hunger and fullness. One of the most basic principles of intuitive eating is still totally possible when you live with food sensitivities or intolerances. Hunger is a basic need and a signal to your body that it needs energy. So if you're eating when you're hungry and you're stopping when you're full, it helps you tune into your body and helps you improve your relationship with food. Your body is very adept at telling you when it requires more food. Consider these questions:

- If you are hungry, how hungry are you?
- Should you be hungry based on your recent eating activity?
- How much food do you think it will take to satisfy you?
- What are you hungry for? Is that a healthy option?

Alternatives for Cravings. Find alternatives to satisfy your cravings. I know and have worked with many people that cannot tolerate gluten or dairy. There are so many fantastic alternatives for many of these products that can help you avoid eating your trigger foods, but yet satisfy a craving that you may have for them. I stock my pantry and freezer with plenty of goodies to keep me satisfied for when I have those doughnut or cookie cravings, without triggering my bloating, or joint pain.

Focus on the Positive. Rather than wallowing in the loss of your trigger foods, think about the many foods that you can eat that are still nourishing your body. Having a positive mindset can also help reduce stress and improve your autoimmune symptoms.

- Before you eat something, ask yourself how you'll feel immediately afterward, and how you'll feel an hour or two later.

MINDFULNESS HELPS



Appearance. What does the food look like? What color is it? Is it appealing? How is the food arranged on the plate? Based on the appearance, how do you anticipate the food will taste and feel in your mouth?

Smell. What do you smell? Can you smell the spices used in the food? How do you anticipate the food will taste based on the smell? Can you tell how hot the food is by bringing it close to your nose?

Taste. It's time to finally taste your food. Feel your jaw moving. Notice how your tongue is involved in the eating process.

- Take your time and chew your food thoroughly. Depending on what you're eating this might require quite a bit more time than you're used to. It's a lot easier on your body to digest food that's been chewed very thoroughly.
- Notice the flavor of the food. Describe the taste to yourself.

Texture. What does the food feel like in your mouth? Is it crunchy? Hot? Cold? Soft? Describe the texture to yourself. Pay attention to the texture after you're done chewing and about to swallow. What does your food feel like now?

The effect on your mind and body.

Foods can affect your mood and your body.

- For example, most people find the taste of chocolate to be very soothing. Hot, spicy foods can be invigorating and make you sweat. You might find that foods containing gluten make you feel bad mentally and/or physically. Maybe you feel guilty about eating animal products.
- Notice the effects that your meal has on your mind and body during and after the meal. Pay attention for two hours after the meal and rate how you feel.

Learn how to manage your emotions without food. Another very basic principle of intuitive eating is to separate your emotions from food. Many autoimmune disorders usually come with a host of emotions. So many people get in the habit of turning to food to cope. While this is fine to do every once in a while, it's really important to investigate if your emotions are dictating your eating habits.



Tools To Manage Your Emotional Eating

One way to start working on this is to use a hunger and emotion journal. Each time you eat, notice if you're eating for hunger, or for another reason. If it's an emotional reason, try to find another way to deal with those feelings without using food. Just because you have food restrictions does not mean that intuitive eating is out of reach. Being an intuitive eater means that you're listening to your body, you're honoring your hunger and fullness, and eating in a way that makes you feel good.

“MAKE FOOD CHOICES THAT HONOR YOUR HEALTH AND TASTE BUDS WHILE MAKING YOU FEEL GOOD. REMEMBER THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO EAT A PERFECT DIET TO BE HEALTHY. YOU WILL NOT SUDDENLY GET A NUTRIENT DEFICIENCY, OR GAIN WEIGHT FROM ONE SNACK, ONE MEAL, OR ONE DAY OF EATING. IT'S WHAT YOU EAT CONSISTENTLY OVER TIME THAT MATTERS. PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION, IS WHAT COUNTS.”
- EVELYN TRIBOLE

THIS WEEK

HOMework

- ✓ Journal about any tendencies you may have toward emotional eating, impulse eating, or intuitive eating.
- ✓ Become aware of the times when a feeling that you might call hunger is really based on emotion. Begin to implement your selected strategy for controlling emotional eating habits.
- ✓ Make a list of some craving alternatives for some "unhealthy" snacks you tend to turn to.

