BOOKMARK TACKLING YOUR TRIGGERS

Recognizing your triggers to over (or under) eat is the first step to overcoming them.

The following are some common triggers to eat or to over-eat:

- Emotions: Anxiety or stress, loneliness, sadness, happiness, boredom, fatigue or sleepiness.
- Rewards: “I deserve to eat this, I’ve had a hard day.” “Our team/class won, so we get to celebrate with all-you-can-eat pizza!”
- Social situations: Parties, holidays, eating out, being with friends, family, or co-workers.
- Habit: “It’s 12 noon, time for lunch.” “I always eat while watching TV.” “I have to clean my plate, my parents always told me to.”
- Taste: The delicious aroma of fresh-baked cookies may trigger you to drop into Mrs. Field’s, even if you’ve just had lunch.
- Deprivation/Diets: Whether intentional or not, going without adequate food (or favorite foods) for long periods of time often trigger overeating beyond physical requirements once food (or favorite foods) are made available.

The following are some common triggers to NOT eat or to under-eat:

- Diets: “I can’t eat that. It’s not allowed on my diet!”
- Guilt: “I overate last night, so I’m not going to eat anything today to make up for it.”
- Emotions (often disguised as “fat feelings”)
  - Feeling out of control or overwhelmed: “At least I can keep my weight in control.”
  - Feeling unhappy: “If only I were thin, my life would be so much better. If I stick to my diet, I’ll be happier.”
- Time constraints: “I’m too busy to stop for lunch.”

What are your triggers?

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2. 
3.

Strategies for overcoming your triggers!

**Learn to identify and express your true emotions.**

- Next time you feel “fat,” try to pinpoint exactly what you are feeling. Are you feeling insecure, inadequate, or overwhelmed? Sad, helpless, or angry?
- Once you’ve identified your feelings, try to get them out! Write them down in a personal journal, talk about them with a close friend or family member, share them with a counselor. If you get your feelings out, it’s easier to deal with them appropriately and/or let them go. Otherwise, you’re more likely to translate them into “fat feelings” and incorrectly respond to them with self-hatred and dieting.

**Learn to set limits in your life and assert independence and control without food.**

- Accept that most things in life cannot be controlled! While it’s good and necessary to plan and prepare for your future, it’s impossible to know exactly what opportunities and struggles tomorrow will bring. Change may be uncomfortable for you; but it is a reality. It’s better to expect it, rather than desperately try to avoid it.

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**Check your balance!** There are six aspects of human wellness (physical, emotional, spiritual, occupational, intellectual, and social). Each of these aspects needs to be nurtured in order for you to be a truly healthy, happy, and whole individual. While it’s normal to be stronger or weaker in certain areas, it’s not healthy to focus exclusively on only 1 or 2 (or to completely ignore any 1 or 2).

**Learn to prioritize!** Make a list of all the activities you are juggling. Your list is probably quite long, and it’s possible to see that you really don’t have time to do everything and still have enough time for yourself (i.e. to exercise; to prepare healthy meals; to relax; and to get 8 hours of sleep every night). But, if you don’t take care of yourself, you’ll be less effective in the other areas of your life. So, you’ve got to find some way to make time for YOU. Start by ranking the activities that you value the most. To accomplish what matters most to you, you may have to give up some of the other activities on your list or learn to combine one with another.

**Practice saying no!** Learning how to say “No” is not easy if you’re someone who’s used to always saying “Yes.” You may be afraid of disappointing others or of being viewed negatively by others if you say “No.” But, this is unlikely. Just as you wouldn’t stop liking or respecting someone because they declined to participate in one project or activity, your friends, peers, and co-workers will certainly not feel any differently about you. Being assertive with your needs and wants may not feel comfortable at first, but with practice and experience you’ll reap the many rewards.

**Let go of perfection!** While it’s great to always strive for your personal best, it’s not reasonable or healthy to strive for perfection in all things. No one is (or can be) perfect. If you set such high standards on yourself, you are certain to fail and feel inadequate no matter how well you perform.

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Learn to nurture your emotional needs without food.

- **Separate physical hunger from emotional hunger.** Before you put anything into your mouth, say “HALT.” Ask yourself, is this physical Hunger? Or, am I eating because I’m feeling Anxious/stressed, Lonely/depressed, or Tired/bored. Eating is not going to make the underlying feelings go away. It’s just a temporary way to numb and comfort yourself.

- **Learn positive ways of expressing and nurturing your emotional needs without food.** If you’re feeling tired, take a nap. If you’re feeling lonely, call a friend. If you’re feeling anxious, go for a walk, meditate, or take a relaxing bubble bath. Create a list of at least 3 things you can do instead of eating when you’re non-hunger cue strikes. It’s not easy to break old patterns, but in time it will get easier.

Know what foods and eating situations trigger a binge. Then work to minimize or avoid them.

- Does having a gallon of ice cream in your freezer trigger a binge during finals week. Avoid keeping “trigger foods” in your house. Go to 31 Flavors to enjoy one scoop of ice cream when a craving hits.

- Does passing the coffee shop on the way to class every day trigger an urge to drop in for muffins and pastries? Try walking to class a different way.

- Does coming home tired and stressed trigger a binge as soon as you walk in the door? Try changing your routine. Rather than going directly home when you’re feeling tired and stressed, go to a relaxing place (a park, the ocean, a yoga class). Then treat yourself to a healthy restaurant meal before going home.

- Is it hard to stop eating after meals? Try brushing your teeth immediately after each meal or popping a piece of gum or mint in your mouth.

- Does studying at home, trigger a binge. Try studying in the library where food is not around.

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Remember the 5 D’s

**DELAY** your response so you can figure out what exactly is tempting you to binge.

**DETERMINE** what’s going on. Ask yourself, “Why is my desire to eat so high right now? Am I physically hungry? If not, “what do I really want or need?”

**DISTRACT** yourself for 10 minutes (WAIT).

**DISTANCE** yourself, physically, from the temptation.

**DECIDE** how you will handle it.

- If you’re tired, take a nap. If you’re feeling lonely, call a friend. If you’re feeling anxious, go for a walk or take a bubble bath.

- If you’re having a specific food craving, identify what you really want, go get a single portion, and enjoy it without guilt!