



# Beginnings of Emotional Eating



## How/why one begins to emotionally eat



### Conditioning

Conditioning can play a big role in emotional eating, through the pairing of particular foods and mood. For instance, foods like chocolate can release trace amounts of mood elevating opiates, such as serotonin, in the body that make us feel good – but only for a very short period of time.

Carbohydrates also release hormones in the body that help us relax, so we can be drawn to these types of foods when we are anxious, or stressed. So, like any type of habit, we learn to associate this good feeling (even if it is only short lived) with eating fatty/carbohydrate-laden foods.

### Childhood patterns

The pattern of emotional eating behaviour can start in childhood. We learn to associate having fun with our friends, with eating junk food at parties and we continue this behaviour throughout our lives. Our parents may also have reinforced our behaviour by giving us a cookie, sweet, ice cream or chocolate when we were upset, to help us feel better, or as a reward for good behaviour (“If you’re a good boy, you’ll get an ice cream!”). So very early on we associate eating certain foods with soothing or improving our emotional states.

### Form of control

People can also use/abuse food as a way of feeling in control of something, or distracting them from thinking about negative experiences or events, but again this distraction and feeling of control is only temporary! The reverse happens with people with eating disorders such as anorexia – people can try to control their lives, by controlling how much they consume. Again – the mind plays a big part in our overall behaviour, so controlling this part of our lives, is essential to living and health and happy life.

### Emotional issues

It’s also worth noting that some people have turned to emotional eating as a result of deep personal issues in their past. These issues are barriers to achieving happiness and they perpetuate the cycle of overeating and low self-esteem. Deeper issues should be discussed with a trained counsellor or psychologist.

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