

Avoiding Emotional Eating

Terri Lance, PhD



the Fasting Method

Simplifying the issue ...



- We use food to manage, avoid, suppress,
 - Instinctive response to perceived threat or discomfort
 - Often not conscious decision
 - Coping strategy we developed naturally
- We can change this process
 - Learn to identify emotions before engaging this strategy
 - Develop other coping mechanisms for emotion management
- Stop identifying as an emotional eater
 - So many other instincts you don't make a self-identifying label

How emotional eating develops ...

- Deep inside the brain some level of “threat” is detected
 - You know, that cute little almond shaped amygdala
 - When danger or threat (discomfort) is detected, the amygdala tells the hypothalamus (command center)
 - The hypothalamus then sends out signals to activate the sympathetic nervous system
 - Acts like the gas pedal
 - Heightens processes (heart rate, breath rate, etc.)
- You act out of instinct to ease the discomfort
 - Lower brain has very primitive responses
 - Knows to kill the threat or eat the threat
- Because the alarm has been set off due to emotional threat
 - You have learned the reward response to eating, especially problematic foods
 - You move toward food to provide relief, activate the calming response



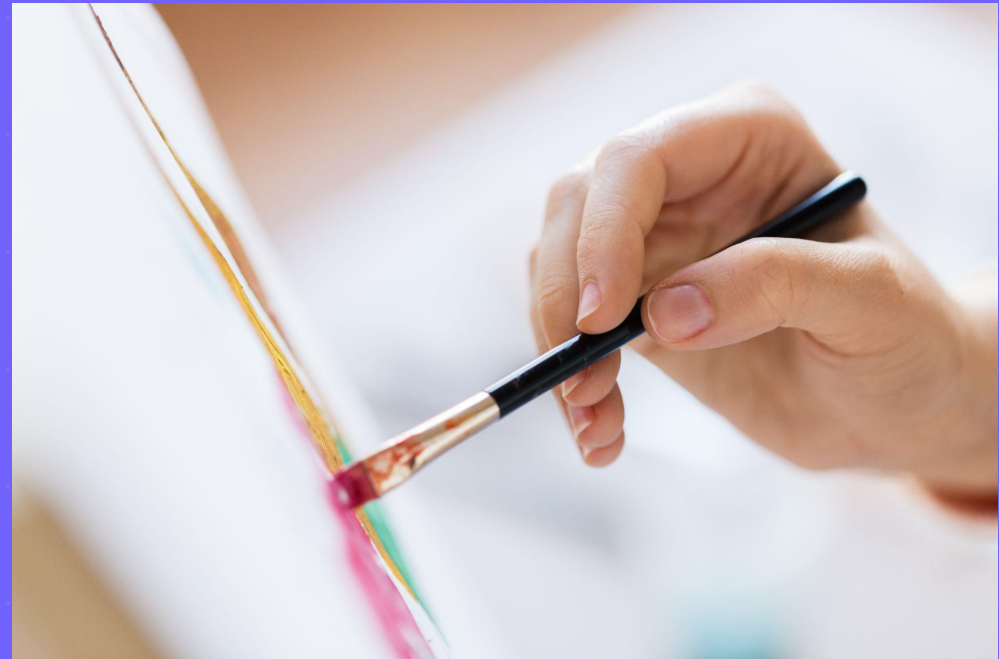
Emotional eating is a learned response...



- Remember that learned responses can be relearned
 - Your brain can learn new thought processes with practice
 - If not, you would never have learned to talk, walk, listen to music, meditate
- You do not have to respond to every instinct
 - You have the ability to choose a different response
 - You absolutely **CAN** circumvent instincts
 - Think of instincts that you delay
 - Think of instincts you interrupt
 - Think of instincts you ignore
- Why do you not engage every instinct you have?
 - Are they all actually in your best interest?
 - Competing needs, goals make you learn a different response

Learning new response...

- Have to catch the instinct in motion before old response path is chosen
 - Learning to pause
 - Set up barriers
 - Provide alternatives
 - Identify the emotions at play–will the choice alleviate them
- Have to tap into values or what is most important to you
 - Remember you likely have competing needs, wants, values
 - Remember that your amygdala is your first responder in your emotion processing system
 - DOES NOT have ability to perceive longer-term or future consequences
 - Can only focus on immediate relief needs



Proof that you do not HAVE to eat emotionally...

- Think of problematic behaviors that you/others utilize to manage emotions
 - Consuming alcohol
 - Using mind-altering drugs
 - Explosive behaviors
 - Withdrawing socially
 - Numbing out on electronics and media
 - Overspending money
- Think of healthy (not destructive) behaviors you/others have to manage emotions
 - Expressing emotions openly and safely (tears, naming the emotion, etc.)
 - Talking to a supportive person
 - Journaling
 - Taking a walk or stretching or lifting weights
 - Reframing thoughts that are linked to the emotions
 - Take a nap, take a time-out, meditate, listen to music



Suggested resources and strategies to continue developing healthy responses to your emotions...

- Book– *Healthy Habits Suck: How To Get Off The Couch & Live a Healthy Life... Even If You Don't Want To* by Dayna Lee-Baggley
- Book–*When Food Is Comfort: Nurture Yourself Mindfully, Rewire Your Brain, and End Emotional Eating* by Julie Simon
- Book–*The DBT Solution for Emotional Eating: A Proven Program To Break The Cycle of Binging and Out-of-Control Eating* by Debra Safer, Sarah Adler, and Philip Masson
- Book–*When Food Is Comfort: Nurture Yourself Mindfully, Rewire Your Brain, and End Emotional Eating* by Julie Simon
- EFT (Tapping)
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Seek support (pain less when supportive person w/ you)

