

Are You Really Hungry? Or Are You an Emotional Eater?

Some people always feel hungry, even after eating. Occasionally, hunger can mask other feelings that people may not want to feel, and whether consciously or not, they reach for something to eat.

According to the book *Shrink Yourself* by Roger Gould, MD, the following information will help you determine if your food choices come from an emotional or physical need.

	Physical Hunger	Emotional Hunger
How Hunger Develops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Builds gradually, is felt in the stomach and arises out of a physical need• If you don't feel hunger pains, growling or hollowness in your stomach, you're not hungry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develops suddenly and is felt above the neck, as in, "I could go for some ice cream."• Emotional hunger is caused by an emotional trigger. You might be thinking, "I want it and I want it now;" demanding immediate gratification.
When Hunger Develops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comes on slowly and occurs several hours after a meal.• It will go away when you're full.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Happens any time and will persist even if you are full.• The feeling often comes on quickly and suddenly.
What and How You Eat When You're Hungry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just about any food will satisfy.• Healthy foods are appealing. Eating is more mindful — you eat with awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cravings for specific foods, usually foods like ice cream, cake, cookies chips or whatever your particular indulgence is will seem appealing.• You may not even notice what you're eating and you keep wanting more food, even if you feel stuffed.
The After-Effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eating will lead to satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eating leads to guilt and shame and promises to do better next time.

Many people are emotional eaters because they have difficulty feeling and expressing their emotions — they feel hungry instead. The problem is they get caught in a cycle where long-term weight management will be difficult, if not impossible. This makes it difficult for them to feel good about themselves.

Suggestions to Help You Control Your Eating Habits

- **Is that hunger real?**
When you think you're hungry, stop and ask yourself, "Is my stomach growling? Do I feel weak or tired, or is this just a craving?"
- **Find another way to celebrate joy, relieve stress or overcome sadness.**
Instead of reaching for that piece of chocolate cake to celebrate your promotion, treat yourself to a good book or movie night with friends. To relieve stress, go for a walk or listen to music. Talk to someone or write in a journal when you're feeling down.
- **Make healthy food choices at the grocery store.**
Stock your fridge with a variety of fruits and vegetables instead of high-calorie comfort foods.
- **Keep a journal of your food habits.**
Note not only what you eat, but how much, the time of day and your emotions. This will help you track eating that may be connected to certain emotions or situations. Over time, you may see patterns emerge that reveal eating patterns and triggers to avoid.
- **Exercise regularly and get plenty of sleep.**
Your mood is more manageable and your body can more effectively fight stress when it's fit and well-rested.

Additional Resources

- *The Pathway* by Laurel Mellin – This book describes The Solution and tells the story of three people who used the method to achieve their solution.
- *Shrink Yourself* by Roger Gould, MD – A step-by-step analysis of the connection between eating and emotion. The book explains why the connection is so powerful and shows you how to break the emotional eating cycle, shed excess pounds and keep them off for good.
- *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* by Brian Wansink – This book uncovers some of the hidden persuaders that cause you to overeat, and offers simple strategies to help you stop.
- *Breaking Free from Emotional Eating* by Geneen Roth – Learn practical ways to recognize the signals of physical hunger, eat without distraction, know when to stop, kick the scale-watching habit, withstand social and family pressures and many more strategies.
- *Feeding the Hungry Heart* by Geneen Roth – Explore emotional hungers that lie behind secret food binges and obsessions.