

With Feelings

Few of us eat simply to avoid starvation. From our earliest memories, food is connected with our feelings of being loved and nurtured. It's not surprising that most of us, from time to time, turn to food when we need to feel loved or to give love.

Family eating patterns often reinforce the connection between food and love. Parents may use food to reward good behavior or to soothe anger or disappointment. Young children are made to feel "good" if they eat all the food on their plate. Older children often continue to feel they must eat whatever they're given by their parents—or anyone else who offers them food.

Feelings May Spur the Urge to Eat

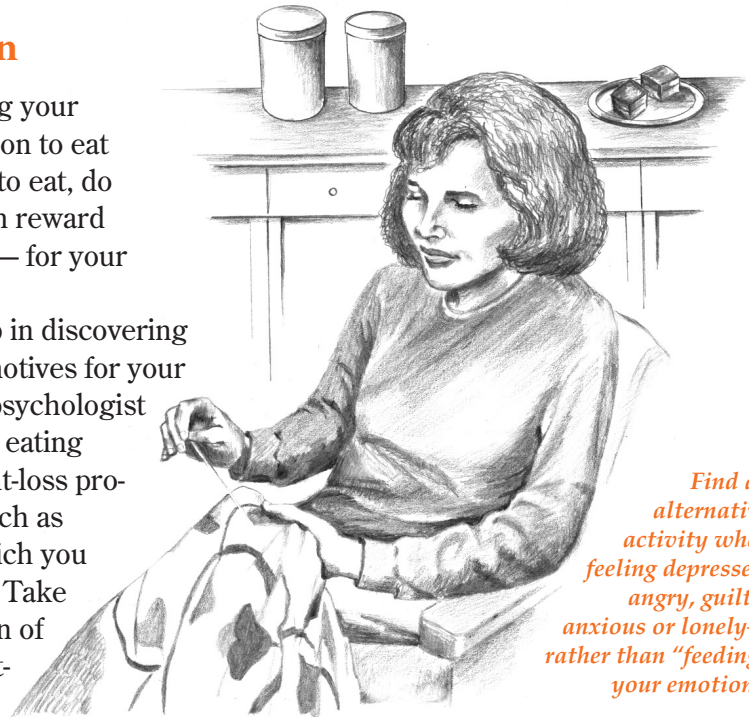
Because food symbolizes comfort and/or love, many people eat to feel better when they're feeling depressed, angry, guilty, anxious, lonely or bored. In order to deal with feelings, you first have to recognize them. When you feel like eating, notice your mood. Are you angry? Anxious? Before you eat, take a moment to write down exactly how you're feeling. Is there something causing the feeling? What can you do about it? Make a list of alternatives to eating that might help you cope more effectively with the feeling. These might include:

- taking a walk or other exercise.
- doing some meditation, relaxation or stretching.
- talking about the emotion with your spouse or a close friend.
- doing something you really want to do, even if you feel you don't deserve it.
- resolving the problem that's causing the feeling.

Breaking the Pattern

When you've finished writing your list, make a conscious decision to eat or not eat. If you decide not to eat, do something on your list. Then reward yourself—but not with food—for your actions.

If you need additional help in discovering the possibly inappropriate motives for your appetite, consider calling a psychologist who specializes in weight or eating problems, a reputable weight-loss program or a support group, such as Overeaters Anonymous, which you may find in the phone book. Take action now to break a pattern of eating because of uncomfortable feelings.



Find an alternative activity when feeling depressed, angry, guilty, anxious or lonely—rather than “feeding” your emotions.