# Emotional Eating: 3 Ways To Stop Stress Eating In Its Tracks

By ALICIA SPARKS

It wasn't until fairly recently (after I'd gained a few pounds and noticed a box of my favorite Kashi bars wasn't going as far as it used to) that I realized I was stress eating.

After some research (and extra time on the treadmill), I came up with a plan to tackle emotional eating.

It's more of an outline, really: Learn what you're dealing with, replace it with something healthy, and eliminate or learn to manage the issue causing the emotional eating.

## 1. Educate Yourself About Emotional Eating

Although I'd heard the terms "emotional eating" and "stress eating" before, I'd never made much of an effort to learn anything about them.

Eating when you're stressed or dealing with emotional issues – seems pretty simple, right?

Um, in definition only.

Over the past few months, I've been dealing with a lot. Work uncertainties, relationship issues, and an upcoming move all had me eating three or four times the amount of food I'd normally eat in a day. When I started gaining weight (a pound here, two pounds there – what the crap, is that a muffin top?!), I thought I just needed to cut back. Maybe work out more.

What I didn't realize was that I was doing what WebMD calls feeding a feeling. I was using food (and reruns of *The Vampire Diaries* and *Gossip Girl*) to take my mind off of the stress of everything else going on.

Now that I'm aware of that, I'm more mindful of *when* I eat. Also, I think about whether I'm experiencing a physical hunger or emotional hunger.

## 2. Replace Stress Eating With Another Activity

Choose an activity that you don't associate with food. Bonus points for things that keep your hands busy.

I like to choose productive things like cleaning or doing laundry – both of which keep my hands busy and both of which leave me with a shorter to-do list when they're finished – but WebMD also suggests taking a walk, calling a friend, playing a game, and even taking a nap.

## 3. Address Why You're Turning To Food

Why are you feeling stressed, depressed, or otherwise emotionally off balance? Identifying that problem and either eliminating it or learning to manage it can help you stop stress eating.

The Mayo Clinic [points out](#) that several kinds of issues lead to stress eating. Unemployment and financial problems, health issues and work stress – even poor weather conditions can cause emotional eating.

For me, once I realized I was stress eating, it didn't take long to realize why. After all, the big stressors in our lives typically don't need flashing red arrows pointed at them, do they? Each problem was different, of course, but they all had some common ground: I was either ignoring them and hoping they'd get better on their own, or I was panicking because I had no choice but to make a choice.

For each of my stressors, it was a matter of taking action, and I did. I made decisions, came up with plans and executed them, and began every conversation I'd been putting off.

Of course, that's not to say I completely eliminated stress eating, but at least now I know how to recognize and stop it before it gets out of control.

**Find More Information About Emotional Eating**

Psych Central writers have tackled emotional eating before. Be sure to check out:

- [Understanding Emotional Eating](#) from [360 of Mindful Living](#).
- [How To Heal From Emotional Eating: Insights And Advice](#) from [Weightless](#).
- How To Overcome Emotional Eating: [Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#) from [Weightless](#).

Too, Psychology Today provides an [Emotional Eating Test](#) to help you determine "whether your overeating is the result of a more deep-rooted issue." The full report costs a fee, but you get a free snapshot of your results.