

Are You an Emotional Eater?

by Amy Scholten, M.P.H.

Emotional eating is a common problem in women and men. It involves eating in response to emotions, especially when a person is not hungry. People with normal eating patterns may occasionally have an episode of emotional eating. However, if this pattern occurs frequently it becomes a compulsion where emotions (rather than hunger) dictate when and how much a person eats.

This assessment is designed to help you determine if you are an emotional eater. Please keep in mind that this is not a diagnostic tool. If you have concerns about your eating behavior, please see a mental health care provider.

Directions: Please read each statement carefully and select the answer that best describes your situation. When finished, interpret your score at the bottom of the page.

1. How often do you tend to think about food during the day?

- a) Only when I'm hungry
- b) It varies, depending on what kind of day I'm having
- c) Frequently - I think about food a lot

2. How much control do you have over your eating?

- a) A lot of control - I can easily say no
- b) Good control most of the time, except on bad days or when I'm around some of my favorite foods
- c) Little control - I seem to overindulge every day

3. How often have you tried to lose weight?

- a) Never, because my weight is in a healthy range
- b) Only when I put on a little weight, which happens occasionally
- c) Many times, but I've never been able to keep the weight off

4. When do you tend to overeat?

- a) Rarely – usually during a special occasion
- b) Occasionally - when I let myself get too hungry or have a rare bad day
- c) Often – usually when I'm feeling stressed, lonely, bored, angry, frustrated, sad, disappointed or worried

5. When you want to eat something, how do you tend to feel?

- a) Genuinely hungry - I usually haven't eaten for a few hours
- b) Usually genuinely hungry because I haven't eaten for a few hours, but sometimes I have cravings
- c) Obsessively focused on the specific food I want

6. How do you feel (emotionally) after you overeat?

- a) Fine - I don't do it very often
- b) Sometimes I feel guilty, so I make sure I don't overeat for the rest of the week
- c) I often feel guilty, ashamed and regretful because this happens too often

7. What tends to have the most influence on *when* you eat?

- a) Hunger - because I haven't eaten for a few hours
- b) Several things – the food that's available, hunger, time of day, or my mood
- c) How I feel emotionally

8. How mindful (aware) are you when you eat?

- a) I'm usually deliberate about the foods I choose and how much I eat; I pay attention to the food on my plate, fork, and in my mouth and stomach
- b) I try to be mindful of my eating behavior, but occasionally I don't pay attention and I eat too much food
- c) I tend to eat mindlessly, not paying much attention to the foods I choose or how much I eat

9. When do you tend to stop eating?

- a) When I'm full
- b) Usually when I'm full, although sometimes I continue to eat after I'm full
- c) I often don't stop eating when I'm full – I eat until my stomach hurts

10. When you're bored, what do you usually do?

- a) Call someone, take a walk, or find some activity to do
- b) Sometimes have a snack, but usually I find something to do
- c) Have a snack

11. How would you describe your main attitude toward food?

- a) I view it as fuel that gives me energy – I eat when I'm genuinely hungry
- b) I usually view it as fuel for my body, but sometimes I use it for comfort when I'm having a bad day

- c) I view food mostly as comforting – it cheers me up or makes me feel calmer and less stressed out

12. Are you ever secretive about what and how much you eat?

- a) No
- b) Yes - occasionally I overeat when other people cannot see me
- c) Yes – I often try to hide my eating behavior from others

13. You are on a strict weight loss diet. In a weak moment, you eat a cookie, which is not allowed on your plan. How would you react?

- a) I don't diet, so I wouldn't know what I'd do
- b) I'd probably go back to my diet, but if I was feeling really bad, I might have a few more cookies first
- c) I'd probably eat the whole box of cookies and maybe some other forbidden foods, but then I'd go back to my diet the next day

14. How do you tend to experience hunger?

- a) It develops gradually
- b) It usually develops gradually but occasionally it develops suddenly
- c) It usually develops suddenly – I feel desperate to eat something right away

15. You were just offered a great new job. How do you celebrate?

- a) I plan a fun activity or buy myself something
- b) I go out to eat at a nice restaurant
- c) I overindulge on delicious, rich foods

Scoring

Number of a, b, and c Answers	Point Value for Answers	Total Point Value (multiply total number of a, b, and c answers by their corresponding point value)
Number a answers:	All a answers = 1 point	
Number of b answers:	All b answers = 5 points	
Number of c answers:	All c answers = 10 points	

	Score (add total of a, b, and c points):
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Your Score	Interpretation
15-47	Your score suggests that you don't typically have a problem with emotional eating. People who fall into this category usually feel in control of their eating. They don't use food as a primary coping strategy for mood regulation.
48-90	Your score suggests that you sometimes have imbalanced eating patterns and use food to cope with uncomfortable feelings. If this happens often enough, you may gain weight. You could benefit from finding some alternative ways to cope with your emotions.
91-150	Your score suggests that you have disordered eating patterns. Disordered eating is characterized by increasing loss of control. Eating is more automatic and compulsive in response to emotions. It often leads to overweight and obesity. You could benefit from counseling to help you cope with your emotions in healthier ways.

Source:

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Biography

Amy Scholten, MPH, has a Master of Public Health in health promotion and education from the University of South Carolina and a Bachelor of Science in food and nutrition from Framingham State College. She is a freelance health writer and has taught stress management at Ithaca College in Ithaca, NY, USA.