



# STOP COMFORT EATING NOW!

Take control of your eating habits for good.

by Eve Menezes Cunningham



## Your Comfort Food

For some, it's savouries and cheeses. Others crave sweet things when they feel in need of an emotional boost. Unfortunately though, when we eat to satisfy emotional rather than physical hunger, we usually end up feeling bloated and annoyed with ourselves rather than comforted. Identifying your usual fixes will help you know when you're comfort eating.

Think about the next time you're likely to want to overindulge.

If it's when you've poured yourself a glass of wine in the evening and you just can't resist that bar of chocolate to go with it, consider giving the wine a miss for a while. If even a glass of milk is likely to result in these chocolate cravings, ask yourself if you can get the same "hit" with just one square of a better quality chocolate bar. Organic, fair trade brands are deliciously rich. If it's crisps you crave, would a slice of wholegrain toast be better for you? Or why not try some vegetable crisps or crudités?

### Your Time Of Need

When are you most likely to overeat when you don't need to? For some, it's after a long, hard day at work. Here, comfort food is associated with relaxation so it becomes automatic. For others, it may be grazing on snacks all day at home, work or even in the car. Being aware of your danger time will help you stop this almost unconscious eating and start enjoying your treats more.

### How are you?

Are you feeling lonely? Angry? Sad? Ashamed? Too many people are completely out of touch with their feelings. They try numbing them with drugs, alcohol and food. But the feelings will keep bubbling up until you deal with them. Start gently if this feels challenging. Make a note of how you felt when you last indulged. Did they help you feel better? If not,

do things differently next time.

Start checking in with yourself at random times of day and just ask yourself, "How do I feel right now?" Being more in touch with your body will help you think of healthier ways to boost your mood. Start a diary and rant as much as you want. Let all that pent up emotion out safely so you don't need to numb it. Talk to your friends, too. If things feel too painful to deal with on your own, consider talking to a psychotherapist who specialises in eating issues.

Food is nourishment for our bodies. Often, people overeat when they're neglecting their emotional, mental or spiritual needs. Would returning to church or starting a meditative practice fill a spiritual hole for you? Would reconnecting with old friends or joining an evening class help you nourish your heart and brain?

## What Works For You

Picture yourself in your danger zone. What are you doing when the craving hits? Do any thoughts crop up which could give you a clue about the emotions you may be suppressing?

What happens when this craving normally hits? Do you give in? How does this make you feel? Have you ever resisted? When you think about replacing the food you crave with fruit or another healthier alternative, does it feel satisfying enough?

Think about other things you can do differently when food cravings sneak up on you. Keeping your hands busy will make mindless eating much harder. If you knit or do needlepoint, this can be a soothing (and less fattening) way to relax. Or try something more active like yoga or going for a walk or swim.

Make a list of as many things as you can think of to help you feel better instead of overeating. Examine the list and ask yourself if the things you've thought of will work fast enough to help you through each tricky time.

Remember, everything is more enjoyable (and, ultimately, comforting) when you're eating it because you want to.

### You Know You're Comfort Eating When . . .

- One Mars Bar just isn't enough.
- The cheese on your sandwich is thicker than the bread.
- You put on your 'fat' trousers in preparation for a night in front of the TV.
- The children have to have carrot sticks for their lunch because you've eaten all the crisps. Again.
- It takes you an hour and a half to prepare dinner, in between handfuls of chocolate raisins (because you need energy NOW).



## Make A Change

If you automatically head straight for the biscuit tin when you come back from walking the dog, how can you adapt your routine? Could you head straight for the kettle and enjoy a cup of fruit or herbal tea? If the kitchen feels too tempting, how about heading for the phone to check your messages? Think about differences you can make to change your unhealthy routines.

## Keep A Food Log

Making a note of every single item (food and drink) that passes your lips will make areas you can improve with a little effort glaringly obvious. Many people think, "I don't understand why I've put on weight. I eat the same as before and am getting even more exercise . . ." But accounting for every morsel will help you remember. Ahh, yes, that extra bar of chocolate probably has been having an impact. Knowing you have to write everything down (if you don't, you're only cheating yourself) can also help you resist overeating in the moment.

## Use Smaller Plates

A recent US study found that cinema-goers ate much more popcorn when it was served in larger tubs, even though they weren't hungry and the popcorn was stale. What kinds of foods do you eat just because they're there? By serving yourself smaller portions, you'll be more appreciative of each mouthful and actually feel more sated than you normally do with mindless munching.



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