



## Moods to Foods: Activity 1

### Discovering Yourself One Bite at a Time:

Most people think that actions beget emotions. Your boss yells at you and you feel sad or mad. Your kid brings home an A and you feel joyous. You eat two slices of cake when you planned on eating only one and you feel ashamed.

The dirty little secret is that emotions actually beget actions. What you are feeling starts the cycle of action – happy or sad, exuberant or shameful. Think about it. What emotion made the boss yell, the kid earn an A, or you eat those slices of cake? Or, better yet, what actions do you take after you feel sad, joyous, or ashamed?

I had a coworker once who was a textbook stress-eater. Overweight, overwrought. If a person paid attention, she could tell simply by the change in the pitch of her voice when she was ready to reach for the muffin tray.

Not because mini muffins are particularly tasty. They're not. And not because she was hungry. She just had breakfast an hour ago. It was a response to feeling stressed – pure and simple. You could track the exact minute in the Monday morning meeting when she realized just how much was expected of her this week by how many mini muffins disappeared.

And my former coworker is by no means alone. Some people eat when they feel stressed. Other when they feel sad. Still others when they feel confused. The emotion triggers the action – and the action is to eat.

So what about you? What emotions serve as triggers for you?

That's what this activity is all about. Figuring out how your emotions affect your food intake. That's it. It's not about examining what happened prior to the emotion – your boss's yelling and your kid's A don't matter right now. Only the emotion you're feeling matters. Because, face it, your boss or your kid isn't the person cramming food into your mouth. You are. It's your feelings and your actions that matter.

So put away everything you think you know about a food journal. I promise you, this is not that. This is not about tracking portion size, calories, or how well you're sticking to whatever "diet"

you think you're on. This is about getting to know yourself better and getting a sense of how your emotions are influencing your actions on a level you may not be consciously aware of.

## Okay, I'm Ready:

This isn't going to take a lot of time. I promise. You're simply going to need to set aside a couple minutes before and after you eat for about three days. That's it. That's plenty of time to get a decent snapshot of how your emotions affect your eating.

And by eating I mean anytime a food substance goes into your mouth. This includes: "just one bite," "just a lick of icing," "just the corner of this cookie," "maybe just a taste." It all counts. It all goes down on paper because it's our stolen moments that tell the most about our unconscious patterns.

So, for three days, you're simply going to answer some questions before and after you eat. Just answer them. Don't analyze. Don't criticize. Don't try to change your behavior. And most importantly, don't lie, fudge, or fiddle with the truth. This is about getting a deeper awareness of how you work, so be nice to yourself. And be honest.

Print out several copies of the next two pages and keep them and a pen or pencil with you at all times. Fill out the **Before You Eat** and **After You Eat** forms every time you eat anything. That means if I eat breakfast, a snack 2 hours later, ½ a cookie at 11:00, lunch, peanuts and milk at 3:00, a sushi dinner, and a piece of beef jerky before bed would need 7 copies of each form that day – one for each eating episode.

Pretty easy, right? Good. Let's get started.

**First** - go to <http://overfortyweightloss.com/free-resources/> and print out the **Body Connection Scale**.

## Before You Eat:

Check out the Body Connection Scale . Use it to help you answer Question 1.

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being Starving to the point of sickness and 10 being Stuffed to the point of sickness) rate your physical sensation of hunger/satiety.

Circle ONE

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. Without thinking about it, write down what emotion you are feeling right now.

3. Take a second and pay attention to your body. Write down what are you feeling physically right now (tense, in pain, light, fidgety, etc.).

4. Write down what you are thinking/saying to yourself right now.

5. If you still choose to eat, what food(s) are you choosing?

## After You Eat:

Check out the Body Connection Scale. Use it to help you answer Question 1.

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being Starving to the point of sickness and 10 being Stuffed to the point of sickness) rate your physical sensation of hunger/satiety now that you have finished eating.

Circle ONE

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. Without thinking about it, write down the emotion you are feeling right now.

3. Take a second and pay attention to your body. Write down what are you feeling physically right now (tense, in pain, light, fidgety, etc.).

4. Write down what you are thinking/saying to yourself right now.

5. Did you enjoy the food you ate?

6. Write down your experience of eating this food. Did you take your time? Did you eat slowly? Quickly? Do you remember eating it?

## Great. I've Done It. Now What?

First, pat yourself on the back. You tracked your emotions and actions for three days - without judgment or criticism. That's something to be proud of.

Now it's time to look at these journals. To analyze them. To put on our detective hat and figure out what connections exist between our emotions and our eating.

Here are some questions to get you started:

1. Read through your journals quickly. What thought comes immediately to mind? Write it down.
2. Take a close look at the emotions you were feeling in your **Before You Eat** pages. Are any listed more than once?
3. Take a look at where you rated yourself on the hunger/satiety scale. Did this rating seem to impact food choice?
4. Notice what foods correspond to what emotions. Do you eat more greasy foods when you are sad? More vegetables when you are happy? Does feeling stressed lead to eating a random sampling of food or is it always something with chocolate?
5. Do the same thing for physical feelings? Did you eat more when you felt tense or light or fidgety?
6. Notice what you were thinking/saying to yourself? Is any of it uplifting? If it is, what foods did you decide to eat then? Are they different when you said negative things or thought troubling thoughts?
7. Take a close look at the emotions you were feeling in your **After You Eat** pages. Are any listed more than once? How do the after emotions compare to the before? Did you feel different after eating certain foods?
8. Take a look at where you rated yourself on the hunger/satiety scale after eating. Did this rating seem to impact how you felt physically and emotionally after eating?

9. Notice what you were thinking/saying to yourself? Is any of it uplifting? If it is, what foods did you eat prior.
10. Write down anything that comes to mind after looking at the pages this way. Does any one thing stand out?

Use this information as a spring board for considering how your emotions might affect your eating patterns. Now that you know how it works, take a second whenever you reach for food and check in with yourself. Use the Body Connection Scale to gauge your level of hunger. Then ask yourself what you are feeling right this second. If it's more emotion than hunger, take a breath and feel that emotion. If you find yourself still reaching for the food, imagine how you will feel after eating it. Will you feel better? Worse? (Use your **After I Eat** pages as guides).

Then consider what might be a better way of dealing with this emotion. Do you really need a break? A walk? A couple of deep breaths? A good cry? A hearty laugh? Pay attention to that. By giving yourself what you truly need, you are honoring yourself and you are honoring your emotions – which is really all they are asking you to do in the first place.

Be well,

Trish Bailey

[www.overfortyweightloss.com](http://www.overfortyweightloss.com)

*Change Your Body ~ Change Your Life*

