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# FAMILY WELLNESS FIRST: NUTRITION

## Emotional Eating

*Your mood (often created by the foods you choose) determines what you eat at your next meal. Imbalanced eating habits trigger a vicious cycle where you feel worse and worse and turn repeatedly to the wrong foods for a quick fix....In contrast, when you make the right food choices, you're providing fuel for a healthy body, a good mood, an active mind, and a high energy level.*

—Elizabeth Somer, *Food & Mood*

The concept of “emotional eating” is most often based on the notion that people become emotionally upset, which then leads them to binge on large quantities of primarily low-quality junk foods as a source of comfort. What is seldom discussed however, is what triggered the emotional upset and cravings for certain foods in the first place. It begs the question: *which came first, the emotional upset or poor nutrition and junk-food binging?*

This is an important distinction. Negative emotions don't just spring out of nowhere. Improper nutrition is a *primary cause* of imbalanced psychological states and frequently triggers emotional upset, which in turn perpetuates the cycle of imbalanced eating and imbalanced emotional states. The only way to loop out of this vicious cycle is to balance the body's internal chemistry by providing adequate nutrients and eliminating offending foods.

Whether it be chronic depression, irritability, anxiety, fear, anger, obsessive thinking, or constant worrying, the *Standard American Diet* is loaded with foods that not only cause physical imbalance and deterioration, but mental and emotional imbalance and deterioration as well.

At the same time, the *Standard American Diet* is lacking in the whole, fresh, natural foods loaded with the vital nutrients needed for proper brain function and mental health. Having an awareness and understanding of this can significantly increase your ability to decipher which foods are best for you, and can also significantly increase your chances for successfully changing your eating habits.

As people begin to eat healthier and develop more body awareness, they're frequently amazed to discover that poor eating in general and certain foods in particular, trigger emotional upsets that cause them to unconsciously eat more of the offending foods rather than the other way around. In fact, the healthier and more balanced they eat, the healthier and more balanced their emotional states become. Because normal brain and



body functions have been restored, they no longer react to situations as they would have in the past. They find they're able to maintain a balanced state of emotional well-being as long as they maintain their healthy eating lifestyle.

### **It's Also About What You *Don't* Eat!**

Remember that proper nutrition is as much about the foods you eat as it is about those you *don't* eat. Foods to which you are sensitive or allergic, including the common food allergens, processed foods with chemical additives, especially aspartame and MSG, and extreme foods such as sugar and caffeine, are all major culprits in creating a psychological environment ripe for emotional fragility.

Equally problematic are the nutritional deficiencies that can result from the absence of nutrient-rich foods in your diet. So it's as important to identify and eliminate offensive foods, as it is to be sure you're getting adequate nutritious foods regularly such as fresh produce and essential fatty acids.

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE

CONTINUED FROM OTHER SIDE

### **Become a Food Detective**

Whether someone is emotionally bingeing or experiencing acute, chronic, or intermittent irritability, depression, anxiety, hypersensitivity, fear, anger, worry or other disagreeable emotional state, learning to listen to the body and correctly interpret and respond to the messages it sends is a worthwhile skill for everyone to develop. The best way to do this is to become a food detective.

Keeping a journal of what you're eating and any corresponding symptoms is one way of playing detective. Another is to train yourself to investigate situations in the moment, and at the same time take immediate action to remedy the current situation and reflect on how to prevent yourself from repeating it in the future. To do so, take a moment whenever you're feeling out of sorts to stop and ask yourself:

1. *What exactly am I feeling both emotionally and physically (i.e., headache, fatigue, irritability, anger, spaciness, etc.)?*
2. *When did I start feeling this way?*
3. *What foods or beverages have I had, or not had, today or yesterday that may have caused or contributed to this imbalanced state?*

4. *What foods or beverages do I regularly have or not have that may be causing an overall state of imbalance in my body and mind?*
5. *What actions can I take at this moment to start feeling better and get my body and mind back into a balanced state of well-being?*
6. *What actions can I take to help prevent this from happening in the future?*

It may take some time to get to know what your body is trying to tell you. But the more aware you become of what causes your symptoms and reactions, the better you'll be able to make corrections. In addition, as the specific associations between what you're eating and how you feel become clearer, the more motivated you'll be to eliminate the foods and habits that are causing you problems. Your desire to feel good will soon override your desire for bad foods. [FWF](#)



**Kelly Hayford, C.N.C.** is the award-winning author of *If It's Not Food Don't Eat It!* As a former chiropractic assistant and junk-food junkie turned nutrition and health coach, Kelly has helped thousands restore their health, energy and natural weight.

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