

*The*  
**EMOTIONAL  
EATER'S**  
*Repair guide*



**5 HELPFUL STRATEGIES TO HEAL YOUR  
FOOD RELATIONSHIP**

# Welcome to Redwood

Hello! I'm Alyssa - Certified Nutrition and health coach. I'm delighted that you've taken this step for your positive food relationship. By the end of this guide, you will be equipped with FIVE strategies to get you started on your emotional eating repair journey.



## What does emotional eating mean?

Emotional eating is a physical response to an emotion – all kinds of emotions, not just ones we deem ‘bad’. There is no such thing as a negative emotion, yet so many of us have come to believe that some emotions like anger, anxiety, jealousy and bitterness are inappropriate or not worthy of expression. Just as emotions are neutral (neither good nor bad), emotional *eating* is neutral, and not something we can (or should) rid ourselves of. Part of what makes us human is the way our emotions are connected to everything we do in life, including our food decisions!

**Your emotions are not the problem. It's the discomfort around the emotion that is causing you to turn to food for immediate comfort, and avoidance of the emotion.**

# Why am I using food as a coping mechanism?

## Do any of these reasons for using food to cope look familiar?

- Discharging energy: not dealing with stressors at the time and needing to later release it physically from our nervous system.
- To access immediate relief, escape and self-soothing. To bring calm to a stressed nervous system.
- To procrastinate from a task or event that you're not looking forward to doing/going to.
- For the taste (sensory) pleasure when you don't feel like life is offering pleasure to you.
- To fill a void which often leads to overeating to feel physically filled up - compensating for not feeling emotionally full.
- To feel a connection to something.

## What outcomes do I want?

*Do you want to stop going to the cupboard or fridge when you're not hungry?*

*Do you want to stop mindlessly eating in front of the TV?*

*Do you want to keep ice cream in the freezer without being preoccupied with it?*

Below are five helpful strategies you can implement in your day-to-day life to get you on your way to healing your food relationship.

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**The Power of Pausing**

1

2

**Your Coping Strategy Toolkit**

3

**Intuitive Eating in Practise**

4

**Connection is Key**

5

**Boundaries + Choices**



Your goal as you implement these healing strategies is not to stop emotional eating altogether, but rather, to move toward a balanced approach where we reduce the connection you have to food as a coping mechanism for your unmet emotional needs.

Let's dive in.

# The Power of Pausing

Between stimulus (emotion) and response (food) is the space for growth. That discomfort is where the magic happens.

The discomfort of pausing before turning to the coping mechanism (food) is where the most growth will occur. Sitting in discomfort will bring about resistance, because your brain has created a neural pathway that uses food for comfort when it's dysregulated. But when you sit with uncomfortable emotions, you are finally allowing them to be heard, felt, seen, understood, validated, and regulated in healthy ways.

## Here's what you can practise when pausing before eating

Bring awareness to the situation with curiosity and without judgement.

Ask yourself

What is it that my body needs? Is it food, or something else?

*What emotion am I feeling?*

*What am I trying to soothe in this moment?*

Can you sit with that emotion? Can you allow yourself to be uncomfortable with it? Because by allowing it to be heard and not suppressed, you are learning to accept it as a valid emotion, and less likely to find a way to drown it out.

# Your Coping Strategy Toolkit

A coping **MECHANISM** is something we do/use to avoid regulating our emotions. Food is an example of a coping mechanism

A coping **STRATEGY** is a helpful way of regulating your emotions without dissociating or suppressing them

You may be thinking that food is all you have for pleasure. Your only enjoyment, your best friend, and your 'drug' of choice. Don't let your emotional connection to food make you lose out on all the other pleasures this life has to offer.

Creating your own coping strategy toolkit will help you to draw on supportive ways to regulate your emotions so food is not your emotional crutch. Food can still be a part of your toolkit because we are not trying to completely omit emotional eating.

## Here are some examples to get you started

**Journalling**

**Moving your body**

**Breathwork**

**Listening to music**

**Connecting with a loved one**

# 3

## Intuitive Eating in Practise

To practise eating intuitively means to move away from external motivators of eating and get in touch with our internal cues.

Intuitive eating is a natural approach to food that puts the focus on reconnecting with your body and instincts and using internal cues like fullness and hunger. This intrinsic way of eating moves away from external influences to eating such as dieting, food rules, and media impacts.

Intuitive eating involves relearning our own hunger and fullness (satiety) cues which may take time. Some people admit that they can't remember the last time they felt hungry or satisfied because they are so out of touch with their intuition.

A helpful tool when beginning to pay attention to your cues is a hunger/fullness scale.



### Some questions you may like to ask yourself:

- *What does hunger feel like in my body?*
- *What sensations do I get?*
- *What do I notice changing when I start to feel full?*



# 4

## Connection is Key

As humans, the need for connection and community is primal, as fundamental as the need for air and water. Unfortunately, many of us instead feel disconnected in this life. We may have people around us all day without feeling like we are meaningfully connected to anyone a lot of the time. The feeling of disconnection encourages us to seek out connection in more immediate and tangible ways, such as eating food.

### Some ways you can feel more deeply connected with others:



Calling a friend/ family member to connect and talk about how you're feeling.



Be intentional about making quality time with your partner.



Get outside in nature to connect with the Earth. Go for a walk and use your senses to bring you back to your body and out of your own head.



Set yourself some screen time boundaries and limitations and connect with yourself. Listen to music, give yourself a pamper session, stretch on your mat, meditate, pray etc



# 5

## Boundaries + Choices

This strategy is about incorporating a supportive, authoritative approach to the leadership of healing your food relationship. You can do this by setting supportive boundaries for yourself alongside helpful choices.

**You can use the following example to help you implement this strategy consistently in your day.**

*You are sitting at home and have just eaten. You are not feeling hungry, but you are procrastinating from doing some tasks that are making you feel slightly anxious. You want to go to the cupboard to eat something sweet - whatever you can find.*

### BOUNDARY

Firstly, you will practise strategy #1 from this guide - pausing. Then gently ask yourself to wait until your next meal to eat something sweet. You know you'll be eating it soon, so you are not depriving yourself of it. Aim to include fat and protein in the meal.

### CHOICE

You decide what it is from the fridge or cupboard that you want, and choose how much of it you will eat alongside your meal.

I hope you find these strategies supportive and useful in your food relationship journey. Give yourself grace as you practise them and be patient in this process.  
Be proud of all the wins, big or small.

If you would like more individualised support in your food relationship journey, or if you have any questions, please email me at [info@redwoodwellbeing](mailto:info@redwoodwellbeing)

Thanks for choosing me to get alongside you in your health goals, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Peace out,

*Alyssa*

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