

WHEN OUR EMOTIONS DICTATE WHAT WE EAT

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WHAT IS EMOTIONAL EATING?

The concept of **emotional eating** is defined as a tendency to **modulate food intake in response to negative emotions** such as anxiety or fear, or positive emotions such as joy or reward, rather than in response to the biological stimuli that characterize **physical hunger**.



PHYSICAL HUNGER AND EMOTIONAL HUNGER?

Physical Hunger	VS	Emotional hunger
		
Triggered by an energy need (biological origin)		Triggered by emotions (Emotional origin)
Gradually increases		Sudden
Sensations physiques (gargouillements, salivation...)		No physical sensations
Physical sensations (gurgling, salivation, etc.)		Not necessarily satisfied by food intake
Consumption of various foods		Consumption of rich / palatable foods (pleasant to the palate)

WHY ?



Emotional hunger is generally used to **compensate for emotional feelings** by eating. It can induce **temporary relief**, leading to renewed episodes of compulsions following negative emotions.

One study suggests that **the interaction between emotions and food** has become stronger with the increasing **availability of food**, and the growing influence of **hedonic processes*** in our food choices.

**linked to pleasure*

Regulating emotions with food is a common behavior, which is not necessarily problematic. This emotional management strategy becomes **worrying when it becomes widespread, less effective** and, above all, when it **generates suffering**.

Emotional eating called “pathologic” is often accompanied by **negative emotions such as guilt, shame, stress, feelings of powerlessness and low self-esteem**. It can also lead to physical symptoms, such as digestive problems or nausea.



WHO ?

Studies estimate the prevalence of emotional eating in the **general population at around 45%** (these figures may vary depending on the measurement tool used). In a population of **overweight or obese people**, the prevalence of emotional eating has been estimated **at 60%**.

THE CAUSES

There are many factors that can contribute to emotional eating, the best known of which are chronic **anxiety/stress, restrictive diets and difficulties in managing emotions**.

Anxiety/Stress

Stress and anxiety can encourage emotional eating.

The increased consumption of **energy-rich foods, often sweetened or ultra-processed**, is then used as a **adaptation mechanism** in the face of negative emotions.

This dietary response, while **soothing in the short term**, can lead to feelings of **guilt, unhappiness and sleep deprivation**, which in turn fuel stress and snacking cravings.

→ According to one study, over **45% of adults say they eat more when they're stressed, even when they're not hungry**.

Restrictive diets

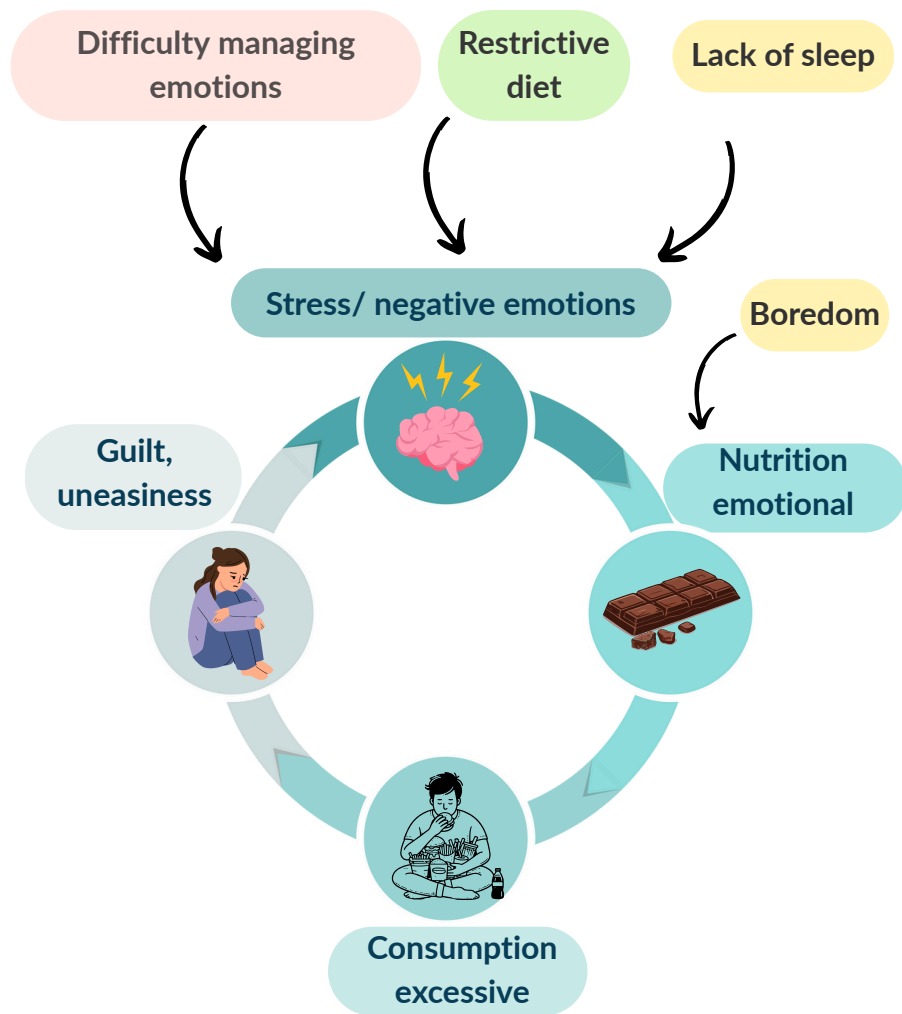
Restrictive diets are often based on rigid mental rules, also known as **cognitive restriction** (e.g. “I don't eat chocolate, it makes me fat”). This **excessive control** encourages **guilt, stress and the need for comfort, which increases the risk of emotional eating**.

The more we deprive ourselves, the more we crave, generating **frustration** and fuelling a **vicious circle** between restriction and emotional eating.



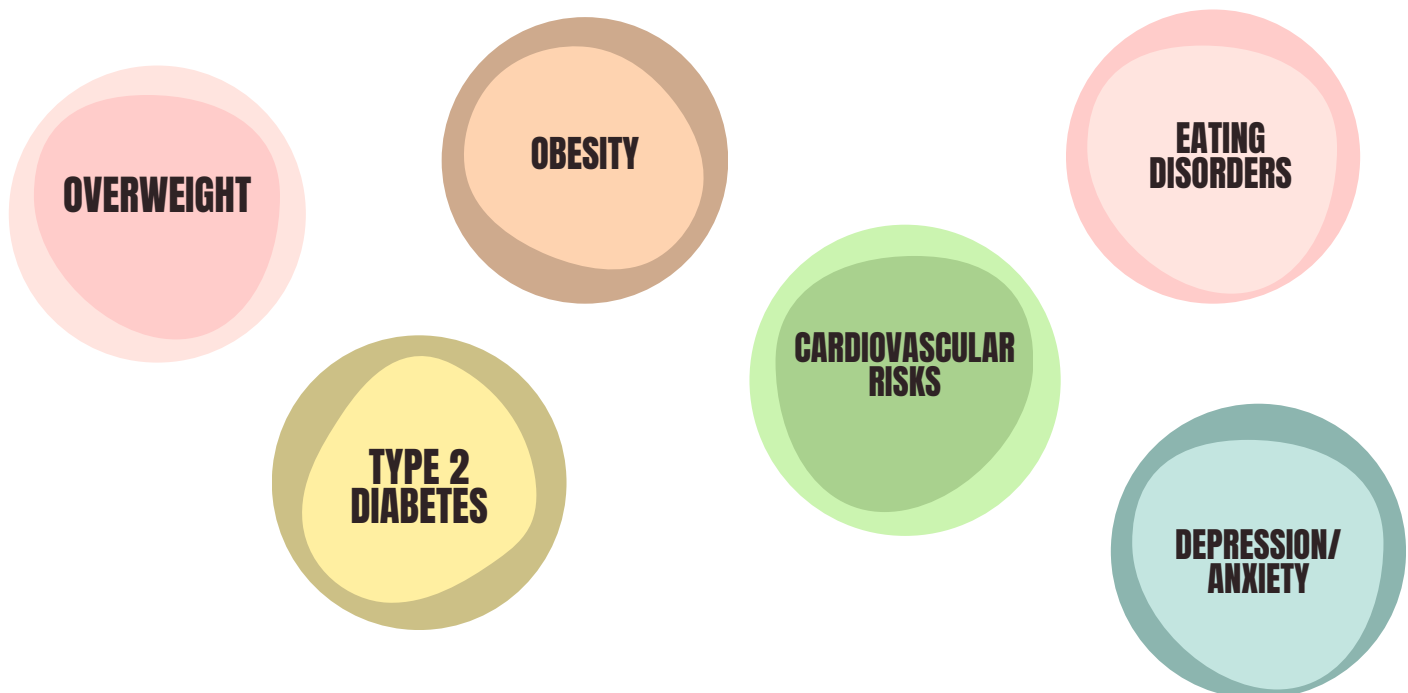
Difficulty managing emotions

Some people have difficulty identifying, expressing or managing their emotions: this is known as alexithymia. These difficulties may be closely linked to emotional eating, as they **limit the ability to cope with stress or negative emotions**, thus favoring the use of food as a means of regulation.



THE CONSEQUENCES

In the case of emotional eating, the foods consumed are generally fatty, sweet, salty, high in energy value and therefore often ultra-processed ([see newsletter Ultra-processed food](#)), which can have harmful consequences for health by increasing the risk of :



The consequences of emotional eating **can also sometimes be its causes**, contributing to a **vicious circle that can be difficult to break**. The underlying mechanisms remain poorly elucidated, and **further research is needed** to better understand the associated pathophysiological mechanisms.

TIPS TO REDUCE EMOTIONAL EATING



CONCLUSION

Emotional eating concerns a large proportion of the population. It becomes a **problem when it is frequent and a source of suffering and/or discomfort**. Identifying the associated emotions can help you to deal with them more effectively, and to **implement appropriate strategies**. In the event of difficulty, we recommend that you **consult a health professional**.



And above all, remember to be kind to yourself!

MEMO

Mindful eating

Healthy eating is not just about what you put on your plate, **it's also about how you eat**. Mindful eating means reconnecting with our sensations, savoring each mouthful with attention and kindness. Too often, we eat automatically, distracted by screens or guided by emotions.

To begin integrating mindfulness into your daily life, we invite you to discover a playful, sensory and surprising experience!

Discover mindfulness... with a simple raisin!

Objective:

Learn to pay full attention to the present moment by consciously exploring a simple food to reconnect with your sensations.



8 steps:



Make yourself comfortable in a quiet place.



Take a **single raisin**, place it in the palm of your hand and **observe** its texture, color, weight and temperature.

***Note:** Observe it as if you were seeing it for the first time, exploring every part of the grape.*



Touch it with your fingertips, eyes closed if you like, and **explore** its texture with your fingers.



Hold it gently with the other hand, to feel its shape and weight.



Hold it up to your nose and explore its aroma. **Note the sensations** it awakens in your mouth or stomach. Breathe in gently.



Place it in your mouth and, without chewing, explore how it feels in your mouth and on your tongue.



Gently **bite into it** and start **chewing slowly**. Observe the texture of the grape and the way its flavor is released. **Note that the tastes change with each bite**. Keep chewing, slowly, until there's nothing left to chew.



Become aware of the urge to swallow, then swallow. Feel the grape slide down your throat into your stomach.



Observe how you feel now. Have you noticed any new sensations (visual, olfactory, gustatory, etc.)? Are you enjoying this moment of mindfulness?

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