

## COPING WITH COVID-19

# HOW TO CURB EMOTIONAL EATING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Is stress about the coronavirus affecting your eating?

As the world attempts to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic, most of us are feeling increasingly stressed. When a [stressful](#) situation of this magnitude arises, people often experience substantial changes to their eating behaviors ([CDC, 2020](#)). Generally described as *emotional* or *stress eating*, we often start to eat (or not eat) in a conscious or [unconscious](#) effort to suppress or soothe negative emotions ([Mayo Clinic](#)). That said, [emotional eating](#) can also lead to regret, physical discomfort, and weight gain because the original stressors will remain independent of our eating behavior. Consequently, until we honestly address the actual emotions driving our eating, our desire to eat will remain when stressed, often leading to longer-term harm to our physical and emotion

#### 5 Tips for Curbing Emotional Eating

If you find yourself stress eating now or in the coming months in response to the

COVID-19 pandemic, here are five tips to help you.



- 1. Become more aware of your feelings and let yourself feel them *away from food*.** Take time each day to reflect on how you feel and whether it is leading you to crave food in an undesirable way.
- 2. Recognize your triggers for emotionally-based eating.** Become clear about when you are most likely to want to eat more or less. Triggers could be anything when your child throws a tantrum during your newly-formed homeschooling program, to wanting privacy in a social-distancing

environment that offers none, to watching too many upsetting news stories. Triggers can also be internal, like thinking about how hard it is to work from home or fighting with your partner and ruminating about your financial situation in the wake of economic struggles.

**3. Make conscious choices about your eating, avoiding triggers when possible.** Choose deliberately what you will eat and when. Challenge yourself to cope with those negative emotions that you may experience away from food.

**4. Get social support while avoiding exposure to triggering material.** Most of us are quite isolated from our typical routines, communities, and social networks right now. Yet humans are highly social beings, and social connectedness is core way we cope with stress and hardship (CDC,

2020). We need to stay in touch with friends, family and the broader community.

**5. Start fresh, each moment of each day.** If you had a rough moment or day and did not like the way you felt or ate, start again. You can always start eating differently at



this exact moment. Beating yourself up about past

eating is not helpful. Instead, encourage yourself to start fresh right now—without judgmental criticism or self-deprecating sentiment—and reestablish a pattern of eating that both acknowledges the difficult emotions you may feel as well as encourages deliberate eating behavior that feels healthy and positive.

## THE NAKED TRUTH

As the world attempts to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic, most of us are feeling increasingly anxious, which often leads to emotional eating. When and if you engage in unwanted eating practices because of strong negative emotion, it is helpful to acknowledge your feelings away from food, understand your emotional eating triggers, and make conscious choices about what you will eat and when.

This is a stressful phase of life for millions of people around the world, so practicing deliberate eating behavior that promotes physical and emotional health is critical.

For General Health Information: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)  
TN COVID-19 Information: <https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov.html>  
TN Mental Health Hotline: 1-855-274-7471  
TN Addiction and Recovery Hotline: 1-800-889-9789

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