

BEYOND THE PLATE WORKBOOK

2022



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PART 5

eating for connection



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Congratulations on completing Part 5 of the "Beyond the Plate" workshop series! In this fifth presentation, we discussed the social and the emotional role of food, as well as the importance of social interactions for physical and mental health.

This workbook will give you space to reflect and work through some of these topics. (Some of the following questions were adapted from the Intuitive Eating Workbook by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch.)

First, spend some time exploring the social role of food in your life. Social connections enrich our lives and support our health and happiness! Food is a means of connection to others, and thus is often a component of social traditions, events, activities, or casual interactions. Answer the following questions to explore how food connects you to others in your own life.



SOCIAL EATING

1. Reflect on any fond memories you have of social events or activities. Write down a few that come to mind.

2. Of those memories that you listed, are there any special or memorable foods or recipes associated with them?



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

3. Are there other informal social activities or interactions you partake in that often include food? Such as brunch with friends, coffee breaks with a colleague, cooking with kids or other family, sharing lunch with an office mate, etc. What do you appreciate about these moments?

4. Reflect on some of your answers to the previous questions. How would you feel if either the social component or the food were missing from those scenarios? Would it change your level of satisfaction? Your mood? Your energy? Your sense of mindfulness?

5. Are there moments in your life where you have used food as a way to help others during stressful times; or have others provided you food as a form of support? In either case, how did that make you feel?



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

II. Food is what keeps us alive, so of course it's what we seek for comfort! Emotional eating is part of the human experience. As we discussed in the presentation, there is a range to "emotional eating". It can feel frustrating, disconnected, uncomfortable, stressful; but it can also feel fun, satisfying, enjoyable, entertaining, or celebratory. Many of the experiences that you listed in the first section of this workbook may bring up times in your life where you felt some of these emotions. Spend some time reviewing the following questions to consider the emotional role of food in your life. ***This topic may bring up some difficult feelings. If you have the space to reflect on this, proceed.***

EMOTIONAL EATING



6. Reflect on moments where you felt like you were emotionally eating. Describe a few scenarios that come to mind.

7. Refer to Question 6. What emotions were you feeling during each of these moments? Would you categorize each example as positive, negative, or neutral?

8. What makes an emotional eating experience positive?

9. What makes an emotional eating experience neutral?

10. What makes an emotional eating experience negative?



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

III. As we've already been discussing, emotional eating refers to a wide range of experiences and emotions- positive and negative. Whether emotional eating is supporting your wellbeing or not is up to you! Rather than automatically shaming or guiltting yourself for eating for emotional reasons, try to practice nonjudgmental curiosity to understand more about the circumstances. What are you feeling? What do you need? Sometimes it's food, and sometimes it's not! The goal here is not to eliminate emotional eating, but to help raise emotional awareness, so you can better recognize your needs, and expand your coping tool kit, if necessary, to effectively cope with emotions. ***If you find it especially difficult to do this work, please reach out to a mental health professional for support. You don't have to do this alone.***



STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH KINDNESS

11. Consider what type of Hunger you're experiencing . Refer to page 8 to review those. Keep in mind that extreme physical hunger can feel like emotional hunger. If you think you are "emotionally eating", first check in with your hunger level. Is it possible that you did not eat enough today? Are you actually physically hungry?

****Note:** Here are some of the different ways our bodies experience physical/biological hunger. Check off any symptoms you're experiencing. If you're hungry, honor your physical hunger, and decide what to eat. If not, then move on to questions 12 and 13.

- Stomach: A variety of sensations including rumbling, gurgling, gnawing, or emptiness.
- Throat and esophagus: Dull ache, gnawing.
- Head: Cloudy thinking, light-headedness, headache, difficulty focusing and concentrating. Experiencing more thoughts about food and eating.
- Mood: Irritability or crankiness. Perhaps you have to work harder to refrain from snapping, even though you don't present as irritable to the outside world.
- Energy: Waning, perhaps even to the point of sleepiness. There can be a dullness and even apathy toward doing anything.
- Numbness: Overall lethargy.

12. If you are not experiencing physical hunger, check in with your emotions. Take a 5 minute time out. Ask: What am I feeling right now? Become aware of your range of feelings. ****Refer to a feelings wheel, if needed. (Example: <https://feelingswheel.com>).** Choose a more general or specific feeling- whichever resonates with you most.

13. Ask: What do I need, right now, to deal with my current feelings? Refer to ideas below or come up with your own. It's okay if you don't know what you need. The action of being aware, and just checking-in to your possible needs is progress.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Distraction	Support	Deal Directly with Feeling	Self-care
Change environment	Call a friend	Write in a journal	Set boundaries
Watch a funny movie	Email a friend	Listen to music that matches my feelings	Practice positive affirmations or compassionate inner dialogue
Find amusing content online	Text a friend	Create a to-do list	Carve out "alone time"
Jam to music	Reach out to a trusted family member	Write a letter to yourself	Sleep or rest
Go out with a friend	Talk with a spiritual advisor within your community	Sit with your feelings for 10 minutes	Write in a journal
Go to store	Reach out to friends within a safe online community or support group	Reframe the thoughts that are causing the feeling. Is there another way to view the situation?	Take a walk outside
Play with your pet	Talk with a therapist	Process with a therapist	Silence your phone or take a break from the computer

14. Add 5-10 activities beyond these examples that interest you. What soothes you? What are you passionate about? What have you always wanted to learn or practice? Which activities would help you process a certain emotion? or provide distraction, support, or self-care?

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

15. Self-reflection: If you encounter an opportunity to practice some of the above exercises, what did you try? Did it help? What sensations did you experience? Did you feel relaxed? or did you still feel heightened emotions? Did you still feel preoccupied with food? Again, if this feels difficult, and you would like additional help to process emotions, or if you find yourself using emotional eating as a form of distraction, sedation, or punishment, please reach out to a professional for help.



Note: Don't think that choosing to eat after leaning into your emotions is a setback. You are still making progress by exploring your emotions and coping mechanisms. And remember, just as you need to have rest days from physical exercise so your sore muscles can heal, sometimes you may need to have a time-out from your emotions so that your emotional muscles can heal. But over time, and/or with extra support and guidance, your emotional muscles will get stronger. Do what you can, and lean into your community or seek out a support network if needed.

Think of the "Spiral of Healing"- It's likely that you will still have tough days and frustrating moments, but you'll also have many wins along the way. This isn't "pass/fail". Take what you've learned, and keep trying to understand more about yourself so you can choose what's best for you each day.





REFLECTION QUESTIONS



TYPES OF HUNGER

- Physical Hunger: This is what most of us think about when we think of hunger. It's that gurgling feeling or stomach growl you may experience when you have gone 3-4 hours without food and your body is ready to be re-fueled. This may also present as light-headedness, low energy, or that "hangry" feeling we all know. This is a hunger where you can trust that your body has used up the previous energy and is ready for more (regardless of how long it has been).
- Practical "Hunger"- Planning Ahead: While biological hunger is important as your main indicator of when to eat, it is also important to be practical with giving yourself nourishment. This may be a strategy for those experiencing stress, chaotic schedules, or absent hunger cues. This is eating something at 6pm even if you aren't significantly hungry because you know that you have an event from 7pm- 10pm and will not have time to eat again until late! By choosing to hold off on that earlier meal, you will end up starving (& more likely to overeat) later in the evening because you have gone too long without food. Eating a light-meal or snack before is a great solution! This is an example of how "Intuitive Eating" is an interplay of intuition and rational thought
- Taste Hunger: This is eating simply because something sounds good or the occasion calls for it (hello Christmas cookies, birthday cake, and Easter chocolate bunnies). Normal eaters can accept that this is a part of life and do not view it as a diet violation. This calls for giving yourself permission to enjoy food in a structured way and move on with your day. This type of hunger prevents overeating & feelings of guilt around healthy & normal behaviors!
- Emotional Hunger: As you start to understand your biological/physical hunger, you are better able to identify why you want to eat. Often when dieting or restricting ourselves nutritionally, we can mistake physical hunger for emotional hunger. Many people realize that what they considered "emotional eating" was actually just a primal need for more energy. However, if you do start to notice that when you are emotionally charged (sadness, loneliness, boredom, anger, etc.) you find yourself seeking out food, first check in with your hunger. If you are unable to find a physical, practical, or occasional reason to be eating, then focus your attention on what you're feeling, and whether it's helpful or not helpful. Consider finding another outlet to healthfully cope with your emotions, if needed. Examples of this could be taking a walk, reading a book you love, calling a friend, or journaling.



THREADS TO FOLLOW

IV. Eating for connection spans many other topics that we've touched on throughout this series! Explore the other workbooks for additional resources related to food, culture, and community. If any specific message from this presentation relating to social or emotional eating really resonated with you, a few resources are listed below for you to reference.

BOOKS, WEBSITES, PODCASTS, AND ARTICLES

- Feed the Resistance, Book by Julia Turshen
- Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World, Book by Dr. Vivek Murthy
- Social Associations and Health Outcomes, County Health Rankings:
 - <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/measures-data-sources/county-health-rankings-model/health-factors/social-and-economic-factors/family-social-support/social-associations>
- Meal Train Services:
 - Meal Train: <https://www.mealtrain.com>
 - Take Them A Meal: <https://takethemameal.com/index.php>
 - Caring Meals: <http://caringmeals.com>
 - Care Calendar: <https://www.carecalendar.org/>
- Eater article, "With Online Spreadsheets, Mutual Aid Networks Are Keeping People Fed During Coronavirus": <https://www.eater.com/2020/4/20/21221588/mutual-aid-networks-coronavirus-resources-food-meals-groceries-delivery-covid-19>
- PBS video, THE ITALIAN AMERICANS-Roseto: <https://www.pbs.org/video/italian-americans-introduction/>
- Find a Therapist in Michigan: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/michigan>
- Find a Certified Intuitive Eating Counselor: <https://www.intuitiveeating.org/certified-counselors/>
 - Refer to Workbook Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3 for additional resources related to intuitive eating, anti-diet, health at every size, or cultural competence.
- Find support for disordered eating: <https://www.theprojectheal.org/treatment-access>
- Michigan Eating Disorders Alliance resource page: <https://www.mieda.org/Be-Informed/Resources>



until next week!

"A party without cake is just a meeting."

-Julia Child
Chef, author, and TV personality

