



Fitness Focus

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Emotional Eating—Discover the Role of Food in Your Life

Kori L. Propst, MS; Personal Trainer, Lifestyle and Weight Management Consultant, Licensed Professional Counselor

Our emotions play a significant role in our food choices. Think about how often you would go to grandma and grandpa’s house, and your favorite snack would be waiting for you. Food was associated with love! I can recall visiting my grandparents and always making a cake. Every dinner was followed with a huge slice. Grandma would always have Ritz crackers with salmon flavored cream cheese waiting for me, and open faced avocado sandwiches, the toast dripping with butter. These are wonderful memories, and it’s not difficult to drift back to those moments... associating those foods with comfort. And I may eat just to soothe myself and avoid an uncomfortable feeling. Have you been there?

Emotional eating is common. Let’s start there. I have plenty of clients who engage in mindless noshing during anxiety ridden situations, when they are feeling angry, sad, bored, or even scared. The biggest problem—they are physically and psychologically unhealthy because of these habits. Understand that it’s natural to engage in eating in certain situations not because you are hungry but because it’s circumstantial, let’s call it. For example, you attend a wedding and have a piece of cake, or you are out with friends and you have a few bites of the appetizer while you’re socializing. When you begin to feel at the mercy of food; however, and eating becomes automatic when difficult emotions arise, then it has become problematic. In other words, emotional eating can be viewed on a continuum. Most often my clients do not realize what they are doing until we start to break down the process of their eating and identify when their eating occurs and under what circumstances. We work to increase their awareness of when they are putting food into their mouths, and more importantly, practice understanding themselves and their emotions in order to develop more productive coping skills!

The body goes through many hormonal changes on a daily basis. The food we eat helps to regulate many of these hormonal fluctuations. So not only can eating be psychologically driven, but it most certainly is physiologically governed as well. Understanding how food will impact physiological reactions and subsequent emotional reactions can help to develop a plan for minimizing emotional “binges.” Even the most determined, strict, and diligent bodybuilder, who is preparing for a competition and is under an incredibly stringent food intake plan, can struggle under pressure and end up eating to satisfy more than a biological need to quell hunger.

As you begin your journey to understanding yourself and your relationship with food, I encourage you to ask yourself the following questions:

1. When do I eat? I often have my clients fill out a daily food log in order to glean some physically AND emotionally valuable information. See sample food log below.

Time	Place	Food	Macros	Feeling
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**Group's Next Steps
Wellness Challenge
March 3rd - May 20th
2008:**

Team Finance (first place team) 179 points, Doug Smets (individual leader) 12 points, Darlene Bliss (Pounds leader) 11 pounds. All results are as of the last fit check on March 18th 2008. The final fit check will be May 20th 2008. Way to go Group!

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Through completion of this log you can begin to establish patterns in regards to specific times that may be troubling, places and situations with certain people, trigger foods, how much is being consumed, and finally, what feeling or emotion was being experienced when food was eaten.

Julie would come to me session after session, berating herself for "eating M&Ms again" and feeling like they were controlling her. She would eat them at home, where no one else was around. She lived alone, "so I didn't have to worry about people seeing me be bad," she explained. This last statement triggered something for me, and I asked her, "How often do you bring your M&Ms to work and eat them?" "Oh, never!" she responded. "I wouldn't want anyone to see me eating them. They are my secret!" And this is where her behavior began to shift... she was putting so much emphasis on HER M&Ms, GIVING them so much power yet feeling so overpowered by THEM. Ever had a secret? Does it not burn a hole inside of you because you want to badly to tell someone? Her homework was to take a bag of M&Ms to work and put it right on her desk for everyone to see. She was scared to death. What would people say? What would they think? Valuable information. What was this pre-occupation with the *possible* thoughts or reactions or assumptions by others? My point is this: she was walking into a feeling of being controlled by this food as a result of her own emphasis put on it and her need to keep it a secret...for reasons revolving around insecurity and lack of confidence, leading to uncomfortable emotions. She could see the cycle now!

2. What are my eating triggers? Use episodes from the past to identify the most difficult emotions, people, places, thoughts, etc. that have lead to emotional eating.
3. When you are in these situations, what alternative behaviors can I engage in? For example, when you are feeling sad, you can go for a walk. When you are frustrated, you can go to the gym and take a spinning class to work it off! Create a note card that you carry with you that you can reference when you notice you're feeling uncomfortable. Obviously you will want to choose activities appropriate for your current surroundings, i.e. work, home, church.
4. How can I reframe the negative thoughts to be more positive and less likely to create negative emotions? Thoughts often lead to emotions, which lead to a specific action. If you can practice a new way of thinking, you may be able to bypass the emotion and thus the damaging behavior. For example, imagine that your boss approaches you at the end of a difficult and taxing day at work and comments, "Your presentation today felt a bit flat. I was hoping for something more lively and entertaining." You might automatically feel discouraged and disappointed in yourself, leaving work with a sense of dread, thinking, "I'm going to lose my job, I just know it." Hello! Did your boss say you were up against the firing squad? When thoughts like this pop into your head, the best thing you can do is make a conscious effort to STOP THEM! Say it if you have to: "STOP!" And then ask yourself where the evidence is that it's true. Next, identify all the reasons why this is silly and the evidence for the exact opposite (i.e. I am a good employee because...) Practice enough, and you will notice how profoundly negative thinking affects you. You will get very adept at turning your thoughts around! Just so you know, I do this in the car when I'm driving. Okay, I admit it, I suffer from a bit of road rage! My thought: "probably some stupid old person who

unsubscribe in the subject line.

needs his license taken away"...(yes, I know this is horrible). I can feel my heart rate climbing and a feeling of frustration beginning. So I say out loud, "Kori, stop it. What's the rush? Relax and breathe, take this time to be calm!" It works if you want it to.

5. Have I acknowledged what I'm experiencing? Again, it may help to say it out loud. Make it real, and give it a voice. "I'm feeling very pressured right now. This isn't comfortable. I feel like eating a big slice of cake." Then rather than raiding the frig, examine where those feelings are coming from. What just happened? Who is around you? What was the trigger?
6. Am I making a conscious decision, and am I aware? Remembering that it is always a choice when we eat can help us to slow down and be more present. You might choose to journal your thoughts and feelings to aid in better awareness. Being able to review what you wrote in previous entries can be very enlightening and may spark some ideas as to how you might help yourself the next time you experience something similar.
7. Am I being good to myself? Treat yourself like you would a dear friend or family member. If you make a poor decision, rather than berating yourself, admit that you made a poor decision, plan for how you can do it differently the next time, and move on. You wouldn't continue telling your friend how worthless he/she is, would you?
8. Am I hungry? If you are not eating balanced meals, it makes sense that you will experience cravings that you may mistake for emotional triggers. Take a look at how often and in what proportions you are eating your calories. Don't deprive yourself, but take a moment if you have a craving to ask yourself if you really want the food. Cravings can be quickly fleeting.

You are worth taking the time to reflect on your habits, analyze your behaviors, and plan for more functional choices. Accept the challenge to understand the meaning of your behaviors and gain confidence at the same time. Use these tips to discover the reasoning behind your behavior in other areas of your life as well.

Are you an Index Expert? --Deciphering the Glycemic Index Kori L. Propst, MS

It is highly likely that you have heard of the glycemic index. It is possible that you know exactly what it is and how it can be used. Guaranteed, is that you are a walking experiment for how the glycemic index affects your body on a daily basis. "What?" you ask. Let me explain.

The glycemic index is a measure of how certain foods impact your blood sugar. Still confused? You are well aware of the importance of eating whole grains and complex carbohydrates as opposed to simple sugars and refined carbohydrates. Great. You go to the store, you look for the word "whole" in the ingredient list, and you recognize that there is oftentimes a lot more fiber in those foods than the others. But do you know WHY eating complex carbs is more beneficial than refined or simple carbs? The WHY is key to mastering your metabolism, burning fat, getting and staying lean, and optimizing your energy levels. So listen up!

That oh-so-lethargic, post-lunch, I-want-to-crawl-under-my-desk-and-snooze-the-

rest-of-the afternoon-away feeling is no accident. There are good reasons for it. And it's your body's way of saying, "Uh, dude, do you think you could feed me less carbs next time, and make them the low glycemic kind so I can function better? Oh, and be sure to include some protein and healthy fat in with that meal too, 'cause if you don't, well....nevermind, I'm too low blood sugar to explain..." Frustrating isn't it?! Get on with it, you're thinking—why does my body respond this way?

When you consume a carbohydrate that is high glycemic, it means that it will be absorbed quickly into your body's cells. Let's break it down even further. You eat a banana. The sugar molecules from the fruit enter the blood stream from the small intestine, and quickly. While there is a small amount of fiber in a banana, the sugars do not require a lot of digestion in the stomach, like a bowl of fibrous broccoli would. So the sugars get in, and then insulin is released from the pancreas. Your blood sugar levels are high, and you may feel pretty energized. But this will be fleeting. Because of the high levels of glucose in your blood, insulin rushes in to get shuttle it where it's needed. Because most of us are not glycogen-depleted when we eat carbohydrates (depending on how many at one time), we won't have a place to store circulating blood sugar. Pay attention- this is what you want to remember: with high levels of blood sugar already circulating, your liver converts it to triglycerides to be stored. Triglycerides are fat molecules. The food you consume does not even have to have fat in it—most high glycemic carb sources don't.

Once your blood sugar levels return to normal, your brain says "hey pancreas, you can stop releasing insulin now..." but a small amount remains until it's utilized. This means that your blood sugar levels can drop below normal, then triggering hunger. The cycle then starts over if you decide to repeat the high-glycemic or high volume hand-to-mouth carbohydrate process. The binge cycle, referred to in a previous article, is triggered by this process, and it's biochemically determined! We have the power to control it though, through smart carbohydrate management!

Smart management translates into consumption of a low-glycemic carb source. These foods are slower digesting as the glucose molecules take longer to break down into a useable form and are absorbed more slowly. A gradual rise in blood sugar provides for slower and more sustained energy release, avoiding a significant insulin increase and subsequent fat storage. Ideally, we would eat smaller and appropriate amounts of carbohydrates to facilitate body fat loss. If we need more glucose, instead of insulin, the hormone glucagon is released, which puts our bodies in a state of retrieval and fat usage.

Use this handy chart to remember how the hormones operate:

Glucagon	Insulin
Released when blood sugar is low	Released when blood sugar is too high
Signals body fat cells to release triglycerides	Signals body fat cells to convert glucose to fat
Liver converts fat to glucose	Signals liver/muscle to store glucose
Blood/liver/muscle glucose/glycogen stabilizes	Causes rebound blood sugar drop
Hunger decreases	Hunger increases
Energy increases	Energy decreases
Metabolism increases if protein intake high enough	

Resource: *The Diet Docs and the Amazing Metabolic Transformation*

Combining your carbohydrate source with a lean protein and/or healthy fat will

further slow down digestion and provide for slower burning energy. Use this to avoid an insulin induced binge and a sabotaging of your fat loss goals! Follow this link to view a glycemic index chart that you may use to make smart carb choices: <http://www.glycemicedge.com/glycemicindextable.html>

Talk to the Trainer



In this section our readers get a chance to ask Kori, an On The Run Fitness trainer, questions regarding fitness. In each issue we will post questions that our readers have sent in. To ask Kori a question or get some advice please email <mailto:kori@ontherunfitness.com>

Dear Kori:

I've heard that a person who is moderately active and looking to increase lean body mass should be eating 1 gram of protein for every pound they weigh. For me – since I weigh 215 pounds – that would be eating 215 grams of protein a day. Sounds like a lot! Is this a good rule of thumb to follow?

Dear Reader:

You should be getting at least 35% of your calories from protein. I'm assuming that since your goal right now is to increase lean mass, you are not trying to "lean out" or drop body fat. It's very difficult to do both at the same time. The lower your calories go, the more your body struggles to retain muscle mass, so it's best to keep the protein higher. If you are resistance training regularly, you will need more protein than the average Joe. 215 is not an unsightly amount of protein by any means. I am 112 lbs and eating 150g/day, so 215 is not unrealistic for your size. Depending on whether I am on a higher or lower calorie day, I'm eating 36%-43% of my calories from protein.

Your best sources, divided evenly throughout the day, are lean proteins (chicken breast, canned tuna, whey protein, fish, top sirloin, ff/low fat cottage cheese). If it's difficult for you to get in 215g/ day, consider having two protein shakes during the day (one as your snack following breakfast, and one between lunch and dinner).

Test Your Knowledge

In this section I will be including 4 fitness/wellness related trivia questions that you can use to test your wellness IQ. Have fun! Answers will be posted in the following newsletter.

1. What are the current exercise guidelines for heart health?
2. Exercise has been shown to increase what type of cholesterol?
3. What type of cardio exercise increases metabolism for a longer period of time following the workout?
4. True or False: Fat reduction is possible by targeting one area of the body with multiple repetitions.

On The Run Fitness



On The Run Fitness owners- Matt Biedron & Kris Barrow

Matt and Kris are both Loveland residents and have 14 years combined fitness experience. They founded On The Run Fitness as a way to help as many people as possible achieve fitness in their community. On The Run also prides itself on a real approach to fitness and does not and will not endorse any short cuts or gimmicks.

Enhancing the lives of Northern Colorado residents one workout and one meal at a time!

On The Run Fitness

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