



# *Food and Mood: Eating and Emotional Regulation during the Pandemic*

Carolina Gaviria, LMHC, NCC, CEDS  
Psychotherapist

Yaneth Bealtran, RD/LDN, CEDRD  
Registered Dietitian & Nutritional Counselor

# Carolina Gaviria, LMHC, NCC, CEDS

- ▶ I'm a bilingual Psychotherapist who specializes in eating disorders, substance abuse and trauma. I work with children, teens and adults and their families helping them identify their strengths and internal resources to find and maintain recovery.



# Yaneth Bealtran, RD/LDN, CEDRD

- ▶ I'm a bilingual nutritionist who takes a holistic approach to wellness providing nutritional counseling to people who believe in the power of the therapeutic relationship between clients and professionals. I guide and support people in the process of finding balance within their bodies, food and lives.



# In this workshop you will learn:

- ▶ The meaning of emotional eating
- ▶ The basic behaviors that describe emotional eaters
- ▶ The signs and symptoms of emotional eating
- ▶ Some causes of emotional eating
- ▶ Strategies for breaking away from emotional eating
- ▶ Resources for ongoing support

# What is Emotional Eating?

- ▶ Have you ever found yourself standing in front of the refrigerator looking for something to eat when you weren't hungry?
- ▶ Are there times when you've had a snack, even though you knew you weren't hungry and you struggled not to eat it because you knew that you'd feel guilty afterward?



- ▶ What made you eat even though you knew you weren't physically hungry?

If we ask with curiosity, not judgment, most likely the answer will be: “It was an emotional urge to eat!”



# Emotional Urge

- ▶ It means eating in response to unpleasant emotional arousal, or occasionally, eating to create a pleasant emotion or make a pleasant emotional state even better (Enhancing emotions).
- ▶ It's a response to an emotional triggering event



# Emotional Eating: Feeding your Feelings

Because feelings seem so complicated and we have been so poorly educated on handling them, it's easy to confuse them with hunger!

Stop and Feel!





# Three basic behaviors describe Emotional Eaters:

1. They overeat to suppress uncomfortable feelings.
2. They choose comfort foods (not broccoli or carrots!) and feel guilty after eating them.
3. They don't have other coping tools or fail to use alternate problem-solving skills.



# Signs of Emotional Eating

Does your hunger come on fast as opposed to growing gradually?

If the answer is YES you are eating emotionally!

Emotional hunger is often dramatic and sudden, and is usually triggered by an event, feeling or memory.

Regular, physical hunger builds slowly, starting with a slight tummy rumble, then a growl, then physical hunger pangs.

When you got hungry, did you feel a desperate need to eat right away?

If the answer is YES you are eating emotionally!

Unlike physical hunger, which will wait for food, emotional hunger is perceived as a DEMAND for food that needs IMMEDIATE satisfaction.





When you ate, did you just stuff the food in quickly or did you overeat?

If the answer is YES you are eating emotionally!

Emotional eaters feel urged to eat and the food is stuffed in very quickly, usually causing overeating.

When hungry, did you crave certain types of food, like cookies, chocolates, a specific flavor of ice cream, or a special food that requires effort to obtain?

If the answer is YES you are eating emotionally!

Emotional hunger demands specific comfort foods that create a specific feeling.





After eating, did you feel guilty or defeated afterward?

If the answer is YES you are eating emotionally!

Emotional hunger results in guilt, regret and promises to not overeat again and sometimes, feelings of shame and failure.

Did you eat when you were feeling angry, lonely, stressed, exhausted, ashamed, hurt, or feeling emotional emptiness?

If the answer is YES you are eating emotionally!

Emotional eating results from an emotional trigger; physical hunger comes from a physiological need with very little emotion attached to it.





#### EATING IN THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

and needs to be filled. She must learn to distinguish one kind of hunger from the other.

There are really two different kinds of hungers, those that come from the stomach and those that come from the heart. The hunger of the stomach must be satisfied with food, but the hunger of the heart must be satisfied with love, with emotional nourishment. Once a woman learns how to recognize the difference between her physical stomach-hunger and her emotional heart-hunger, her needs for food and her longings for emotional sustenance, and how to respond to them, she no longer has to worry about becoming fat.

Like animals in the wild, we all have a built-in gift from Mother Nature that tells us when to eat and when to stop eating, when to drink and when to stop drinking. In their natural habi-

- *Dr. Anita Johnston*



# Emotional Eating

## Mixed Messages:

- ▶ Food is GOOD - “Finish your homework and get dessert as a reward.”
- ▶ Food is BAD - “Be careful - you’re getting fat!
- ▶ Food is a SUBSTITUTE - “My mom and dad keep fighting, so I’ll eat these cookies in my room and will feel better.” “I have nothing to do, maybe I can eat some ice-cream”.
- ▶ Food is LOVE - “I love you, I feed you!” - memories associated with food!

# Mixed Messages Create Ambivalence

- ▶ “On one hand, I want to lose weight and control my eating to be “healthy”, but on the other hand I’ll feel deprived of my favorite foods (emotional fear and frustration)”
- ▶ Ambivalence is resolved when the benefits of the new behavior outweigh the costs of the old behavior!

# Emotional Avoidance: Fear of Feelings

This fear often develops early in life:

- ▶ Expression of feelings is discouraged or unsafe
- ▶ The fear makes you avoid painful emotions at any cost because you're scared to face them
- ▶ Avoiding feelings makes them worse



# Triggers for Emotional Eating

## Hormonal Influences:

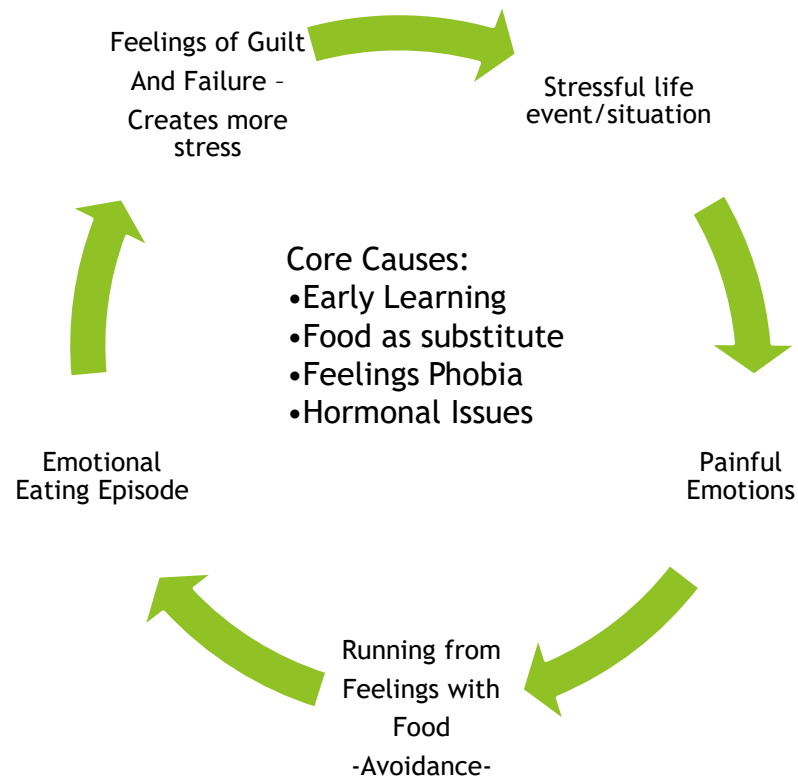
- ▶ Sugar cravings - can be related to low cortisol (a hormone in the brain that gets depleted by stress)
- ▶ Carbohydrate cravings - problems with serotonin levels (a hormone in the brain that regulates mood, appetite and perception)
- ▶ Depression - can be related to estrogen/progesterone balance, low cortisol, or thyroid levels
- ▶ Stress - can be related to problems with cortisol levels
- ▶ Anxiety - estrogen/progesterone balance; high cortisol; thyroid problems

# Chronic Stress & Emotional Eating

- ▶ Can release hormones like adrenaline and cortisol that impair perception, mood, hormonal balance and health
- ▶ Can impact mood regulating hormones in the brain
- ▶ Can lead to adrenal fatigue and serious physical health problems
- ▶ Can trigger serious mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and OCD
- ▶ Can impact self esteem and fear of failure
- ▶ Can lead to weight gain and increase tendency to store visceral fat around middle of body



# The Cycle of Emotional Eating



# Breaking Away from Emotional Eating: Finding Freedom, enjoying food and dealing with your emotions!

- ▶ Managing feelings
- ▶ Mindful eating
- ▶ Stress management
- ▶ Healthy habits
- ▶ Alternate strategies for self-care
- ▶ Treatment team includes physician, psychotherapist, nutritional counselor and psychiatrist

# Facing the Feelings

It starts with:

- ▶ Recognizing that emotional eating usually has a precipitating event that triggers an unpleasant or painful feeling
- ▶ Reassessing our attitudes toward emotions
- ▶ Emotions are not good or bad
- ▶ E-motions are just “energy in motion” and this energy can be redirected
- ▶ Emotions will change with time and a change of perception
- ▶ Emotional tolerance, emotional regulation and feeling management can be learned and get better with practice



# Feelings are NOT Facts

“We’re not supposed to feel good all the time; it’s simply not possible. You... have a range of emotions that come and go and that’s the way life is supposed to work. The truth is, there’s actually no such thing as a “bad” feeling. By labeling a feeling negatively, what you mean is that it causes you to feel badly (that is, not pleurably), or that experiencing it makes you feel as if you’re a bad person. Feelings are feelings, just as colors are colors and musical notes are musical notes (and food is food).”

~ from the workbook “Food and Feelings, a Full Course Meal on Emotional Health” from Karin R. Koenig, LCSW, M.Ed

# Increasing Awareness of Feelings

- ▶ Learn to identify feelings
- ▶ Use word lists
- ▶ Pay attention to how emotion feels in your body
- ▶ When the urge to eat hits suddenly, ask yourself: “Am I really hungry or is this an emotion disguised as hunger?”; “What other strategies for taking care of my emotions can I use other than food?”
- ▶ Choose emotional coping strategies ahead of time
- ▶ Find alternate strategies so you’re not caught off-guard
- ▶ Keep a journal of what works
- ▶ Manage emotions with mindfulness techniques

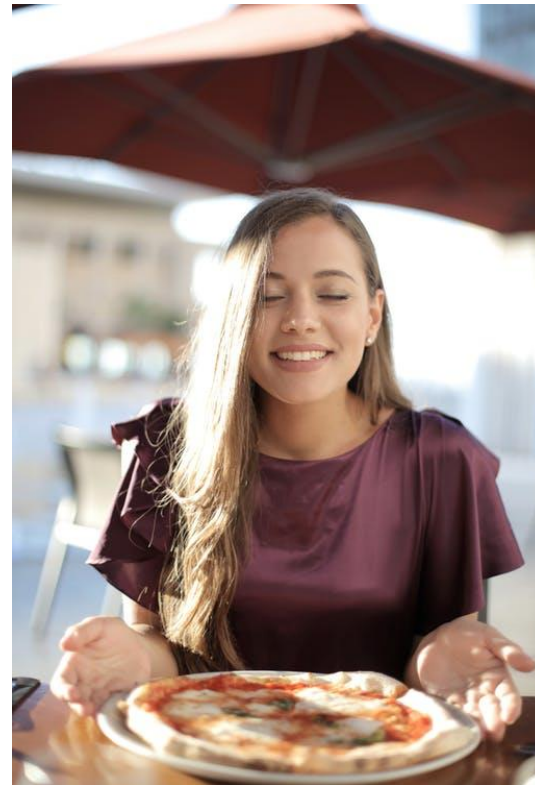
# Managing Your Feelings

Feelings and the “food trance”:

- ▶ The “food trance” is an escape state
- ▶ In the “trance”, bad feelings are transformed into the pleasure of eating
- ▶ Unpleasant or painful emotions are triggered and avoidance and fear stops you from dealing with them directly
- ▶ The rational brain shuts down and mindless or emotional eating occurs, followed by guilt, shame and a sense of loss of control and failure
- ▶ The trance can be overcome with Mindful Eating

# What Is Mindful Eating?

- ▶ Engaging our rational mind to stay aware of our thoughts and feelings as we eat
- ▶ Being aware of all of our senses as we eat
- ▶ Allowing sufficient time to eat
- ▶ Listening to your body for physical hunger and fullness cues
- ▶ Discovering alternate “feel-good” states other than the “food trance”



# Mindful Eating Behavior

- ▶ Check in with your body and internal cues to determine your levels of hunger and fullness
- ▶ Check in for any emotions arising and identify them in your body - name them
- ▶ Take time to engage your five senses and look, touch, smell, taste and listen to the food you have in front of you and in your mouth
- ▶ Chew slowly, savoring each bite
- ▶ Be aware of how you feel while you are eating
- ▶ Remind yourself that you have alternative strategies for meeting your emotional needs
- ▶ Give yourself permission to enjoy your food!!

Adapted from Breaking Free from Emotional Eating by Geneen Roth

# Mindful Eating

- ▶ Remember that physical hunger is normal and develops gradually
- ▶ Give yourself permission to leave food on plate if you are experiencing levels of satisfaction
- ▶ Eat in full view of others - no secret eating
- ▶ Sit down when you eat
- ▶ Eat without distractions
- ▶ Avoid emotional conversations when you eat - keep the table a sacred place to enjoy food!
- ▶ Create a lovely eating environment
- ▶ Tell yourself, “I choose to eat this”



# Stress Management

It includes:

- ▶ Increasing self-awareness
- ▶ Using relaxation techniques to manage stress effectively
- ▶ Setting healthy boundaries
- ▶ Recognizing and challenging negative thinking
- ▶ Recognizing your own limits and letting go of those things that you can't control
- ▶ Nurturing your interests and spiritual growth
- ▶ Limiting contact with negative people



# Healthy Mind-Healthy Body



- Exercise
- Sleep well
- Get annual physical exam
- Take care of your mental health and learn healthy ways of coping
- Adjust your expectations of weight and body image based on age and stage of life
- Expand your notion of beauty!
- Follow a well balanced meal plan and take multi-vitamins, and supplements if appropriate



# Self Care is NOT Selfish!!

Instead of using only food for emotional “medication”, find alternate strategies for self-care and nurturing:

- ▶ Practice awareness of your body, your emotions, and your thoughts
- ▶ Learn to identify emotions. Labeling emotions helps to decrease their intensity.
- ▶ Practice assertiveness to ask for what you need and want from others
- ▶ Increase your social support
- ▶ Find ways other than eating to get your needs met (i.e Make a list of alternate “need-meeting” strategies)
- ▶ Identify individual coping strategies that work for you

# Healthy Cycle



# Resources:

- ▶ Book: Eating In the Light of The Moon by [Anita Johnston, PHD](#)

- ▶ Books by [Geneen Roth](#):

Women, Food and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything

When Food Is Love: Exploring the Relationship Between Eating and Intimacy

Lost and Found: Unexpected Revelations about Food and Money

Breaking Free from Emotional Eating

When You Eat at the Refrigerator, Pull Up a Chair: 50 Ways to Feel Thin, Gorgeous, and Happy {When You Feel Anything But}

- ▶ The Food and Feelings Workbook by [Karen R. Koenig](#)
- ▶ The Intuitive Eating Workbook (A New Harbinger Self-Help Workbook) Paperback - Illustrated, March 1, 2017 by [Evelyn Tribole](#) (Author), [Elyse Resch](#) (Author), [Tracy Tylka Ph.D](#) (Foreword)

# Websites

- ▶ [Welcome to the International Association of Eating Disorders Professionals Foundation! \(iaedp.com\)](http://iaedp.com)
- ▶ [Home | laedpsfl \(iaedpsouthflorida.org\)](http://iaedpsouthflorida.org)
- ▶ [National Eating Disorders Association](http://National Eating Disorders Association)
- ▶ [Get Help Today | Alliance for Eating Disorders](http://Alliance for Eating Disorders)
- ▶ [Home - The Body Positive](http://The Body Positive)
- ▶ [Home | The Food & Mood Institute, LLC \(thefoodandmoodinstitute.com\)](http://thefoodandmoodinstitute.com) \* You can use the code 50GRATIS to access our courses for free (Spanish and English)

## Wrap Up

▶ What's the one thing you'll take away from this webinar?

# Carolina Gaviria, LMHC, NCC, CEDS

Phone: 561.305.2497

[www.solutionsintherapy.com](http://www.solutionsintherapy.com)

Locations:

- ▶ 5300 W. Hillsboro Blvd  
Suite 210  
Coconut Creek, FL 33073



\* Sessions available in  
English, Spanish and  
Online



# Yaneth Beltran, RD/LDN, CEDRD

Phone: 954.773.3139

[Home](#) | [Mysite \(homeforbalance.com\)](#)

Locations:

- ▶ 5300 W. Hillsboro Blvd  
Suite 210  
Coconut Creek, FL 33073

\* Sessions available in English,  
Spanish and Online

# Transform Your Relationship with Food & Body



- ▶ Visit <https://www.thefoodandmoodinstitute.com/> for more information about our online programs to deepen your work and heal your relationship with food and your body.