



Sparking Youth to Create
Healthy Communities

Wise Eating for Youth
Take Charge of Your Emotions
without Using Food

K-STATE
Research and Extension

Module 4: Take Charge of Your Emotions without Using Food

Purpose

- This module will teach youth techniques to prevent overeating and how to handle emotions without using foods.

Learners' General Goal

- Discover ways to prevent overeating and handling emotions without using food by the end of this module.

Learners' Objectives

- Define overeating.
- Explore reasons why people overeat and how to avoid it.
- Define mindless eating.
- Define emotional eating.
- Describe why emotions might lead to overeating.
- Find ways to handle emotional “ups and downs” without using food.

Important Tips for Leaders

- Emotions lead some youth to undereat or overeat. Serious emotional problems may develop into eating disorders, such as bulimia and anorexia. If you suspect a youth has an eating disorder, talk to the parents and refer the youth to a medical professional, social worker, or school nurse or counselor for appropriate professional help. Because the problem is so complex, don't try to counsel the youth yourself.



Activities

- Explore differences between physical hunger and emotional hunger.

Discussion

1. What is overeating? How can it happen?

- Overeating is eating more food than what your body needs for normal growth and development.
- Paying attention to your body's hunger signals helps you avoid overeating. You don't always have to feel full.
- Eating too fast can lead to overeating. Slow down so your brain has time to know your stomach is full.
- Besides physical hunger, emotional hunger is the leading cause of overeating. Your feelings can affect what and how much you eat.
- Some people eat to deal with negative or positive emotions, which is called emotional eating. Therefore, emotional hunger is eating in response to a food craving when you are not physically hungry.
- Ask youth:
 - Have you ever gone from feeling hungry to feeling stuffed or too full?
 - How do you feel when you are stuffed?
 - What might happen to the extra calories (food energy) you eat?

- Imagine this situation:
 - It's 12:30 p.m. at a fast-food place. You eat a burger and fries in a hurry. At 12:40 p.m. you're still hungry, so you buy a fruit pie. What's the problem?
 - Point out: When you eat too fast, you don't give your body enough time to feel full or satisfied; that's when you might overeat and feel stuffed. Even if you can eat faster, it takes about 20 minutes to feel satisfied!
 - How can you manage your eating to bridge the time gap before you feel satisfied?
- 2. **Ask youth the following questions.**
 - Has anyone ever said to you: "Eat something; you'll feel better"?
 - Who has done that? How did you feel at the time? **Focus on youths' emotional reasons.**
- 3. **Use visualization to start youth thinking about some ways to overcome the emotional "hunger" — an emotional craving for food.**
 - Close your eyes and imagine: You're totally stressed out with a pile of homework that's due and a big test tomorrow! Your friend needs to talk to you; you just had a big argument that's upsetting both of you. Your mom's on your back about your messy room. It's so messy you can't find the notes you need to study. You walk to the kitchen mindlessly, as you decide what to do next. You see a package of cookies and a bowl of apples on the counter.
 - Ask youth:
 - What's your mood? How do you feel?
 - What will you do once you get to the kitchen?
 - How will you feel after you do that? What are the consequences? Will eating resolve your problems?
 - Do you see the difference between physical hunger and emotional hunger?
 - Discuss with youth:
 - Eating triggers: Your moods are triggers that can lead you to feel like eating. Everyone has different triggers. What triggers your eating?
 - Actions: Emotional triggers lead to actions, such as eating out of stress, boredom, anger, loneliness, happiness, excitement, or eating too often, or eating too fast. How do your moods affect your eating?
 - Consequences: Satisfying your emotional "hunger" may have positive or negative, short- or long-term consequences. If you eat to satisfy your emotional "hunger," what might be some of the consequences?
 - How can you apply what we just talked about?
- 4. **What is mindless eating? Define mindless eating.**
 - Mindless eating can be defined as eating food without paying adequate attention to what and how much is being eaten.
 - Mindless eating can be influenced by environmental factors such as friends and family members, the size of plates and glasses, big versus small serving bowls and spoons, and even lighting and music.
 - Eating mindlessly can cause people to eat too much, make poor food choices, and lose touch with feelings of hunger and fullness.



5. What is emotional eating? Define emotional eating.

- Eating to deal with negative or positive feelings such as fear, boredom, stress, frustration, tiredness, putting off doing homework, loneliness, or happiness, excitement, feeling sociable, proud, etc., is called emotional eating.
- It may help relieve your feelings for a short time; however, it can also lead to overeating without ever resolving the problems or feelings you had.

6. Why isn't emotional eating encouraged? Discuss with youth the reasons to avoid emotional eating.

- Eating to deal with emotional problems may feel good at first. But feeling guilty or stuffed after eating too much is not going to help in the long run, and the problem most likely will still be there.
- You may feel better for a little while if eating distracts you from other things or problems in your life.
- Some people may feel bad about eating too much or when they know they have made choices that were not the best for them.
- More negative feelings can lead to even more emotional eating.

7. Suppose your moods trigger emotional "hunger." What can you do to feel good and keep you in control of your emotions and your eating? Have youth pair up to brainstorm five things they would be willing to do — besides eat — if they felt bored, stressed, angry, or lonely. Have them share their ideas with everyone.

8. Have youth set one individual goal and write down actions they will take when feeling the desire to eat because of their emotions.

For example:

- Goal: I'm going to control my cravings when I'm stressed out.
- Actions: Walk the dog to get away from the kitchen. Eat a piece of fruit instead of a high-fat and high-sugar snack. Eat one cookie instead of the whole package.



Resource

How to deal with negative feelings.

- Do something more active by yourself: dance, take a walk, run up and down the stairs, do sit-ups or push-ups.
- Roller-blade, skateboard, or play some pickup basketball with a friend.
- Draw or play music.
- Read a book or magazine.
- Write a letter or an e-mail message.
- Write in your journal or diary.
- Write some positive things about yourself.
- Talk to a friend.
- Ask friends for hugs.
- Let yourself cry.
- Breathe deeply.
- If you are really hungry, pick a food-group snack with less fat and fewer calories. And decide ahead of time how much you will eat.



Worksheet

1. Come up with ways to slow down your eating during a meal.

Focus on listening to your “body talk” and body cues to know when you are really satisfied.

2. Why don't you want to let your emotions control your eating?

It would not be a good idea to use food to satisfy your feelings because you could overeat and affect your body's proper growth and development.

3. How can you handle your moods without turning to food?

Instead of eating, do something positive in exchange for negative feelings.





Resources

Intuitive Eating, 2012, E. Tribole and E. Resch

Mindless Eating, 2010, Brian Wansink

K.N.A.C.K Online: <http://knackonline.org>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015-2020, 8th Edition, 2016

The Power of Choice, United States Department of Agriculture, Department of Health and Human Services, 2003

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