



The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed

EPISODE #11

TITLE:

TRANSFORM EMOTIONAL EATING INTO FEEL-GOOD FEELINGS

With These Blues-Busting Foods

For many, negative feelings--such as anxiety and depression--lead to out-of-control emotional eating or binge eating. Understanding the food-mood connection gives us many science-backed insights into foods that can bust the blues and reduce odds of emotional eating episodes. Here, 3 "transformation" strategies, plus some quick-fix, feel-good foods that may help.

TRANSCRIPT

Hello! Welcome to The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed. TODAY'S TOPIC: Transform Emotional Eating into Feel-Good Feelings with These Foods.

I'm Deborah Kesten—nutrition researcher and host of The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed, and I'm on a mission: To give you the science-backed, weight-loss wisdom you need to eat less and weigh less. Without dieting.

In each episode, I'll translate cutting-edge weight-loss research into actions you can take that can make a real difference in your weight and well-being.

LET'S GET STARTED!

Millions of Americans struggle with emotional eating--consuming a lot of food, in one sitting, with the intention of self-medicating negative emotional states, such as anxiety and depression. Typically, emotional eaters turn to ultra-processed foods that are high in sugar (think cookies), high in fat (think French fries) or high in carbs (think donuts).

Binge eating disorder (BED), which is the most common eating disorder in the United States, is a close sister to Emotional Eating. It means eating a large amount of food, alone, during a short time period. And doing this one or more times each week, for months, even years on end. The guesstimate is that nearly 3 percent of the U.S. population are binge eaters.

Here's a closer look at what emotional eating and binge eating look like.

Jessica was at work when she was blind-sided by her most recent emotional-eating episode. Nothing specific had happened to set it off. She was putting the final touches on her latest project report, when—WHAM!—like a light switch—she was overwhelmed by anxiety. What would happen if her report wasn't

good? Would she miss out on a possible promotion? Would her colleagues lose respect for her? Would she be fired? Her carb-craving hit—hard.

Jessica—who has been overweight since her teen years—had been on a diet and had been “good” for a week. Now she was about to blow it. On autopilot, without a second thought, she walked out of the high-rise office building and headed straight to her favorite deli. Five chocolate-chip cookies would do it. After wolfing them down in the privacy of her car in the parking lot, she felt calmer; the anxiety had diminished. Jessica returned to her office and to her almost-finished report.

Anne is binge eater, but her overeating experience is much different from Jessica’s. Anne’s nighttime binge eating typically starts after work with a trip to the supermarket to buy bags of potato chips, a couple of pints of ice cream, her favorite cake, and chunks of her favorite chocolate. Then she heads home, changes into comfortable clothes, and turns on the TV. Settling into bed surrounded by her favorite foods, she begins what she describes as “zoning out”—eating until she feels calmer—often to the point of falling in and out of sleep well before bedtime.

Although this is a typical evening for Anne, three hours after starting her binge she is amazed to find that she has finished all the food (products). On a not-quite-conscious level, she senses the chips and chocolate relieve her anxiety in some way. At the same time, she’s concerned about these binges because she wants to lose fifty pounds and stop zoning out, but she hasn’t figured out how to accomplish this. Dieting hasn’t helped, nor have willpower or the techniques she’s read about in self-help books. In the meantime, Anne remains frustrated about her weight and is vaguely depressed and distressed and dependent on food binges to manage her darker moods.

Jessica is an emotional eater; Anne has binge eating disorder. Both turn to high-carb comfort foods to soothe negative emotions. And both have been struggling with being overweight for years.

Emotional Eating: A 'Family' of Negative Feelings

Most of us are familiar with the phrase “emotional eating,” turning to comfort food to soothe negative feelings such as depression, anxiety, or anger, but also sometimes to enhance joyous, celebratory feelings in response, let’s say, to a birthday or promotion. If you often experience out-of-control eating to manage your feelings and to self-soothe—in other words, for reasons other than having a healthy appetite—it’s likely you’re an emotional eater.

If you are, this matters a lot to you and your weight, because out of the seven overeating styles that behavioral scientist Larry Scherwitz, PhD, and I identified, Emotional Eating surfaced as *the* strongest predictor of overeating—and the number-one contributor of weight gain. As a matter of fact, although all seven overeating styles we identified are significant, dependable predictors of overeating and becoming overweight and obese, Emotional Eating was leaps and bounds ahead of the others as a predictor for overeating and weight gain.

Another powerful insight is this: Larry’s and my discovery of today’s 7 new-normal overeating styles—and their antidote, the elements of our Whole Person Integrative Eating program—revealed that Emotional Eating is just a nose length ahead of the Fast Foodism overeating style in predicting obesity. Put another way, the two overeating styles of Emotional Eating and Fast Foodism—our term for the high-sugar, high-fat, high-calorie, ultra-processed foods that emotional eaters turn to—are the strongest drivers of overeating and becoming overweight and obese.

The bottom line: Larry and I discovered this powerful combination: Emotional Eaters trained in the Whole Person Integrative Eating program (1) reduced their overeating episodes as a way to cope with negative emotions, (2) and, they replaced high-carb, high-sugar, processed foods with smarter food choices that included more veggies and legumes. The end result: participants in the study experienced less overeating and more weight loss. Without dieting.

As illuminating, I had similar results when I taught Whole Person Integrative Eating during a study I did with 75 health-psychology students at San Francisco State University. As with my online course, (1) the

students made significant reductions in each of the negative emotions that prompted them to overeat, (2) and, they significantly *reduced* their intake of fried foods and sweets, and they *increased* their intake of fruits and vegetables.

The WPIE Training Effect on Emotional Eating

I want to take a moment to repeat the two key findings I just mentioned--because my findings are strongly linked to groundbreaking studies about the influence of food on emotions AND the influence of food on the good and bad bacteria in your gut and in turn, emotions.

Here are the two findings again:

- #1. Students reduced their overeating episodes as a way to cope with negative emotions.
- #2. They replaced high-carb, high-sugar, processed foods (the ultra-processed foods that emotional eaters typically turn to) with smarter food choices that included more veggies and legumes.

In other words, not only did participants in the study experience less overeating and more weight loss; our research with students on Whole Person Integrative Eating revealed that both **feelings** and **food choices** are key factors in controlling weight. As a matter of fact, our key finding is this: The combination of reducing negative feelings and improving food choices were the strongest predictors of how much weight people in our study lost.

I'm highlighting these two findings, because 21st century scientific breakthroughs give us profound insights into the connection between (1) food and feelings (2) and the profound connection between how the food choices we make influence feelings.

Why care? Because a better understanding of these state-of-the-art breakthroughs linking food with feelings and gut health may help the millions who struggle with Emotional Eating. A personal comment: I know that when I share the findings with people I coach, that I'm about to share with you, just having this understanding about food and mood often motivates them to make improvements in their food choices.

The New Science of 'Food and Feelings'

Here's breakthrough finding #1. Psychiatrists call it Nutritional Psychiatry. Psychologists say its Nutritional Psychology. Others describe the food-and-feeling connection as Cognitive Nutrition. I use the term Psychological Nutrition to identify the growing specialty that investigates how the food we eat impacts how we feel emotionally. Indeed, it is a growing medical specialty that investigates the link between food we eat and emotions; and conversely, how thoughts and feelings often affect food choices.

What the new science of 'food and mood' teaches us is this: What you eat each day can lead to feel-good feelings and to mental and emotional well-being; or it can up the odds of negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety. The choice is yours.

Origins of the Food-Mood Connection

The idea that the food you eat can actually impact your emotions was given the scientific stamp of approval in the 1970s when Judith Wurtman, PhD, a scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), discovered what many of us know intuitively: what you eat affects your mind and mood, your tendency to pile on pounds, even your quality of life.

When Wurtman and her husband, Richard Wurtman, MD, also a researcher at MIT, first linked food with mood, it was based on their discovery that both naturally occurring sugar and starch in carbohydrate foods (such as potatoes) as well as sugar added to food products (such as cookies and cake) elevate a powerful, naturally occurring chemical in your brain called serotonin.

Even more fascinating was their discovery about the impact serotonin and other *neurotransmitters* (substances that pass information from cell to cell in the brain) have on your every mood, emotion, and

food craving. For instance, about twenty minutes after you eat a carbohydrate-rich food, your brain releases *serotonin*; in turn, you feel more relaxed and calm.

Want to feel more perky? Consume a lean, high-protein food such as fish, and the substance that's released (*norepinephrine*) lets you feel more awake and energetic (unlike the kick you get from caffeine, you're not stimulated, just more alert). Or if you want a natural high, consider choosing vitamin C-rich oranges, legumes, nuts, or dark chocolate—foods that end up as *endorphins*—substances in the brain that produce pleasurable feelings.

Happy Gut, Happier You

Breakthrough #2 is about another powerful side to the food-mood story: There is also a *gut-brain* connection, which tells us that an unbalanced gut (too much 'bad' bacteria) can increase odds of negative emotions and stress. And the opposite is also true: negative emotions can also cause an imbalance of good and bad bacteria in your gut, and in turn, negative feelings. Here's why.

What do industrial farming, pesticides, herbicides, additives, preservatives, and denatured, ultra-processed (UPFs), junk, and fast food with low nutrient availability and lots of added chemicals have in common? They are all part of Western dietary changes over the last seventy years that threaten the stability of both your emotions and your *gut microbiome*. Made up of trillions of microorganisms that live in your intestinal tract, the microorganisms that comprise your gut microbiome play a critical role in both your physical *and* mental health.

What I mean is this: The highly processed foods that comprise today's standard American diet (SAD is the acronym) contribute to an excess of 'bad' bacteria in your gut; and conversely, high levels of bad gut bacteria up the odds of mood problems like depression and anxiety. In other words, negative emotions that lead to emotional eating and consuming lots of UPFs can also damage gut microflora and create an excess of bad microbes. The end result: the negative emotions-bad microbe cycle continues.

Here's the takeaway: If you're an emotional eater—if you cope with unpleasant, unwelcomed emotions by overeating and bingeing on high-carb, high-fat, super-sweet foods—the soothing serotonin these ultra-processed foods release may bring feel-good feelings for a while.

But at the same time, they're also upping the odds of creating lots of 'bad' bacteria in your gut, which in turn, also increase the odds of negative feelings—from anxiety and depression to anger, frustration, and more.

IT'S AN ENDLESS CYCLE

In other words--processed food-soothing serotonin-bad bacteria-negative emotions--are an endless cycle.

What's an emotional eater to do? Here are some proactive steps you can take to turn the tide.

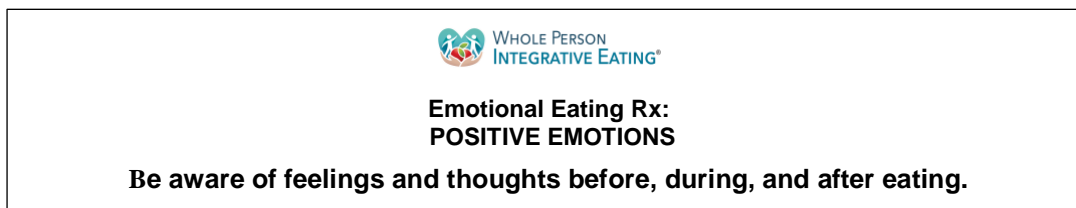
3 Transformation Tips to Overcome Emotional Eating

For starters, let's look at some "transformation tips" that may help you overcome Emotional Eating. Then I'll give you some quick 'n easy, mood-friendly recipes that lead to feel-good feelings, without the down side.

As I share these tips, please consider this: They are meant as a lifetime practice; a way of eating and relationship to food that becomes your most-of-the-time *dietary lifestyle*. Think of the following transformation tips as the start of your Whole Person Integrative Eating journey that may help you overcome the urge to splurge over time. They are not meant as a quick-fix. Be patient with yourself. Be kind. Be compassionate. Self-growth can be one of life's most challenging journeys...especially when it comes to food and eating.

#1. Be aware of feelings.

Be aware of feelings and thoughts before, during, and after eating is the Whole Person Integrative Eating (WPIE) Rx for Emotional Eating. Here it is.



How might being aware of feelings and thoughts not only before bingeing, but also during and after, help with Emotional Eating?

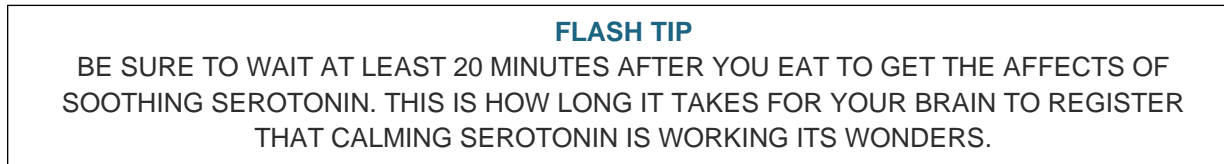
Here's an example: By identifying your feelings *before* giving into a food craving, you're taking a moment to connect with the emotions that are driving you to dive into your favorite comfort food. This can also be opportunity to decide to binge on foods that not only can lead to feel-good feelings for the short-term, but they may also up the odds of sustaining positive emotions.

In a few moments, I'll give you some quick-fix, blues-busting recipes to help you accomplish this.

#2. Check in 20 minutes after eating.

What's the reason for checking into your feelings not only before, but also *during* and *after* an Emotional Eating experience? Earlier in this episode I told you about the food-mood connection: the discovery in the 1970s that certain macro-nutrients, such as carbohydrates, release chemical messengers that can calm and relax you (such as *serotonin*) or help you be more alert (*dopamine*).

But here's the caveat: it takes about 20 minutes for your mind-body to register the soothing serotonin effects of say, the high-carb cookie you just ate.



When you take the time to check in and see if the food-mood effect has kicked in, you can enjoy, savor, and delight in the calm, pleasant feelings you're experiencing. In this way, you're both accessing and filling yourself with positive emotions. At the same time, you're making a mind-body, feel-good connection to food and the experience of eating.

#3. Mind Your Microbiome

Earlier in today's episode, I mentioned the human microbiome and its far-reaching effects on emotions. Sometimes called your "second brain," the gut-brain connection is based on the trillions of cells that live inside your gut microbiota, which have the power to communicate directly with neurons in our brains.

An abundance of "good bacteria" in your gut can keep negative emotions in check, your immune system strong, and they can protect you against a plethora of mind-body ailments. But when microbiota is altered due to exposure to a poor diet of ultra-processed food and ongoing stress, negative emotions such as depression and anxiety can be ignited. The solution? Eat an abundance of gut-protective fresh, whole foods that are rich in anti-inflammatory antioxidants, minerals, and essential fatty acids—foods that can regulate and strengthen the microbiome and in turn, enhance emotions. In other words, when your gut is happy, you're happier!

Here are some quick-fix recipes to get started.

RECIPES: QUICK-FIX, MOOD-ENHANCING, BLUES-BUSTING FOOD

Anxiety. Dieting. Bingeing on high-carb sweets. Millions of emotional eaters self-medicate their negative emotions such as depression and loneliness by overeating high-carb sweets that, as we've discussed earlier, can actually calm unpleasant emotions, at least for the moment. But ... we also discussed they can up the odds of even more depression and anxiety. And weight gain.

Here's another option: When you're having an Emotional Eating episode--or it's likely you'll have one in the not-too-distant future--consider turning to some of the following quick-fix, mood- and gut-friendly foods and snacks.

These quick-fix, blues-busting recipes bring the benefits of soothing serotonin and mood-enhancing 'good' gut bacteria—without the "crash" and weight gain that bingeing on processed, high-calorie, ultra-processed food (products) can cause.

The key concept: When you have the urge to splurge on sugary, processed, high-carb food products, choose *real food* to bust the blues. Here, some quick-fix, blues busting recipes:

Avocado toast. Toast a piece of multigrain bread of choice; sourdough, if possible. Top it with guacamole.

Oatmeal. Enjoy a bowl of cracked oatmeal with a handful of blueberries and a nonmilk, milk of choice (almond milk, soy milk, etc.).

Popcorn. Air-pop some popcorn. Spritz lightly with water or extra virgin olive. Sprinkle with a dash of salt and pepper. Toss.

Nuts/seeds. Try a quarter cup of raw, unroasted nuts or seeds of choice. A sampling: walnuts, cashews, almonds, pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds.

Nut butter. In a small saucer, add a tablespoon of raw, unroasted nut butter of choice: peanut, sesame (tahini), cashew, almond, or any other nut butter. Drizzle a teaspoon of honey over the nut butter. Blend. Enjoy it as a dip with some fresh veggies or baked yellow corn chips.

Veggies. Munch some carrots, celery, or cherry tomatoes. Optional: Use the nut butter blend, above, as a dip or spread for your veggies.

Dips and spreads. Use the nut-butter blend above as a dip or spread. Or try some hummus or guacamole as a dip.

Fish. Enjoy a tuna or salmon salad. Mix together: water-packed tuna fish, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise, diced celery and diced red onion, juice from ½ lemon, salt and pepper. Spread between 2 slices of multigrain bread.

Beans. Roast already-cooked garbanzo beans and enjoy them as a snack. Or add them to a fresh green salad.

Fruit. Have an apple, papaya, some dates, raisins, orange, frozen grapes, banana, kiwi, cherries, pineapple pieces, tangerine, or any other fruit you like.

Chocolate. Savor a piece or two of dark chocolate with 70% or higher cocoa content. Or make hot chocolate with 100% cocoa powder and milk of choice.

Emotional Eating Rx: Eat for Feel-Good Feelings

Here's the key takeaway from today's episode: Two breakthrough findings about food and feelings up your odds of overcoming overeating driven by emotional-eating episodes. We now know you can enhance emotions and up the odds of feel-good feelings--for both the short- and long-term--if your most-

of-the-time food choices include fresh, whole, blues-busting foods I mentioned earlier in Quick-Fix, Blues-Busting Recipes—instead of high-fat, high-sugar, ultra-processed foods (UPFs) that wreak havoc with your hormones and the balance of good and bad bacteria in your gut.

In other words, if you turn to fresh, whole food that enhances feel-good feelings, you're more likely to lessen the odds of Emotional Eating moments. In this way, you're empowered to take charge of your mental and emotional well-being. And perhaps your weight. One meal at a time.

YOUR IN-ACTION EXERCISE

A tip, step, or reflection that can contribute to your success.

So you can reap the rewards of what you discover on each episode of The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed, I close each episode with an '**In-Action**' **Idea** for you to try. This may be a **Quick-Tip** about how to implement the healing secret of food we just discussed; or a **Practical Step** you can take, such as ordering a size-down of your favorite coffee concoction. Or perhaps I'll suggest a **Self-Insight Exercise**, an internal-reflection that can lead you closer to achieving your food-related health goals.

I'll offer an In-Action Exercise at the end each episode that can contribute to your transformation from today's, 'new-normal' way of eating—which leads to overeating and overweight—to Whole Person Integrative Eating—which I describe as your scientifically sound, personal guide to eating less and weighing less. Without dieting.

Consider keeping a Healing Secrets of Food Revealed journal to write about your experience with each In-Action Exercise.

TODAY'S IN-ACTION IDEA

PRACTICAL STEP

Here is today's In-Action Practical Step.

PRACTICAL STEP

Here are some of the quick-fix, blues-busting recipes I mentioned in today's episode. Most bring the benefits of soothing serotonin and mood-enhancing 'good' gut bacteria—without the "crash" and weight gain that bingeing on processed, high-calorie, ultra-processed food (products) can cause.

Look over the quick-fix, blues-busting, fresh-whole-food recipes (below) that I discussed in this episode about Emotional Eating of The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed. Do any look "welcoming" and tasty to you? So much so that you would enjoy one or more the next time you have the urge to splurge on sugary, processed, high-carb food products?

If "yes"...

Choose 3 recipes you like. Then keep the ingredients in your kitchen, or in a bag you take to work, so they're readily available--when and if--an Emotional Eating episode manifests.

RECIPES: QUICK-FIX, MOOD-ENHANCING, BLUES-BUSTING FOOD

Avocado toast. Toast a piece of multigrain bread of choice; sourdough, if possible. Top it with guacamole.

Oatmeal or other whole grains. Enjoy a bowl of cracked oatmeal or other whole grains with a handful of blueberries and a nonmilk milk of choice (almond milk, soy milk, etc.).

Popcorn. Air-pop some popcorn. Spritz lightly with water or extra virgin olive. Sprinkle with a dash of salt and pepper. Toss.

Nuts/seeds. Try a quarter cup of raw, unroasted nuts or seeds of choice. A sampling: walnuts, cashews, almonds, pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds.

Nut butter. In a small saucer, add a tablespoon of raw, unroasted nut butter of choice: peanut, sesame (tahini), cashew, almond, or any other nut butter. Drizzle a teaspoon of honey over the nut butter. Blend. Enjoy it as a dip with some fresh veggies or baked yellow corn chips.

Veggies. Munch some carrots, celery, or cherry tomatoes. Optional: Use the nut butter blend, above, as a dip or spread for your veggies.

Dips and spreads. Use the nut-butter blend above as a dip or spread. Or try some hummus or guacamole as a dip.

Roasted chickpeas. This flavor-filled, healthy snack is quick 'n easy to make. Soak dry chickpeas overnight. Rinse. Then place them on a towel to absorb excess moisture. Toss them with a sprinkling of extra virgin olive oil, salt, and pepper and any other spices of choice. Bake the chickpeas in an oven preheated to 425 degrees F for 20-25 minutes, or until they're crunchy and lightly browned. Enjoy!

Fruit. Have an apple, papaya, some dates, raisins, orange, frozen grapes, banana, kiwi, cherries, pineapple pieces, tangerine, or any other fruit you like.

Chocolate. Savor a piece or two of dark chocolate with 70% or higher cocoa content. Or make hot chocolate with 100% cocoa powder and milk of choice.

Thank you...

If you would like a summary of today's In-Action Exercise, please visit HealingSecretsPodcast.com. Then look for the yellow light bulb next to the "In-Action" CTA. At HealingSecretsPodcast.com, you can also listen to this episode again, and read the transcript and my ARTICLE about overcoming emotional eating. And, please consider joining The Healing Secrets Podcast Community—where I'm looking forward to meeting you.

I want to thank you for joining me today on The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed. With each show, I'll share step-by-step, science-backed insights you need to nourish 'all of you' – body, mind, soul, and social well-being – each time you eat. So you can thrive.

I'm Deborah Kesten, host of The Healing Secrets of Food Revealed.

Until next week, BE NOURISHED.

Disclaimer: This transcript is for informational purposes only. This transcript is not intended to be a substitute for professional health or weight loss advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your health professional or another qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding your condition or well-being.