

## Exploring Why You Eat

Healthful eating is more than just the foods you choose to eat. It also has to do with:

- When you eat
- Where you eat
- How you eat
- Why you eat

About 75% of overeating is caused by feelings, not hunger. This means that many of us use food to cope with our feelings.

### **How do you deal with feelings of anger, conflict, and stress? How do you deal with feelings of loneliness, boredom or sadness?**

Emotional eating is eating because of stressful feelings. It may lead to a habit of using food to feel better.

### **Do you eat because you are tired or to help you fall asleep?**

Night eating is a pattern of eating 25% or more of your daily food after dinner 2 or more nights per week. You feel like you need food to fall asleep or stay asleep.

### **Do you find comfort in food?**

When you have these feelings, eating something sweet or salty can give a sense of relief, but this feeling often turns into guilt or shame. Put a stop to emotional, nighttime and boredom eating, and become a mindful eater.

### **How do you change your eating pattern?**

Find a quiet time to listen and explore why you or your child eats and what is bothering you or your child. Find healthier ways to cope and deal with emotions and stress:

- Journal or write about it.
- Share with a safe person.
- Go for a walk.
- Take a nap.
- Read a book.
- Take a drive.
- Put on some music and dance.
- Work in the garden.
- Seek help from a mental healthcare provider.

### **Meet basic needs first.**

- Get enough sleep.
- Make time for regular meals and snacks.
- Plan time for exercise. This helps the brain release chemicals that decrease stress and improve mood.

### **Learn what it feels like to be hungry and what it feels like to be satisfied by using a hunger scale:**

- 0: Stomach feels empty
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4: Stomach feels hungry
- 5
- 6
- 7: Stomach feels satisfied
- 8
- 9
- 10: Stomach feels tight and full

**Take care of your child or yourself in old and new ways.**

- Listen to soothing music.
- Take a yoga class.
- Get a massage.
- Learn to meditate.
- Find time for your favorite fun things to do.

**Teach Back**

What is the most important thing you learned from this handout?

What changes will you make in your diet/lifestyle, based on what you learned today?

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below. You can also visit our website at [www.uwhealth.org/nutrition](http://www.uwhealth.org/nutrition).

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH) can be reached at: **(608) 890-5500**

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF) can be reached at: **(608) 287-2770**

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#407