

EXERCISE: RECOGNIZING FEELINGS

You can print this exercise.

Alma:

I eat when I'm feeling lonely, sad (comfort food), stressed, happy, frustrated or angry. I also eat when I feel excited, anxious, confused, dejected, disappointed and bored or when I experience inner emptiness.

Alma admits that she eats too much when she experiences different feelings. She is now conscious of why she eats and can identify and express her feelings, but she cannot accept unpleasant feelings and she wants to avoid them as much as possible. Many women who see food as a refuge are not conscious or are barely conscious of their feelings. This is why we have compiled a top 10 of unpleasant feelings, which we regularly encounter with women who struggle with unbalanced eating habits. They are listed in alphabetical order.

1. Anger
2. Disappointment
3. Fear
4. Fear of failure and perfectionism
5. Feelings of guilt
6. Helplessness
7. Insecurity
8. Loneliness
9. Sadness
10. Shame

These emotions are often very tormenting and can contribute to overeating or binge-eating, or even to a complete loss of appetite. Shame and guilt feelings often occur after you have eaten too much or after a binge-eating attack. To make it easier for you to recognize them we will now discuss these feelings in more detail. We will also ask you if you recognize these feelings in yourself. This exercise belongs to the book **Ending Emotional Eating**. The more expressions you have checked off, the greater the chance is that emotional eating is playing a role in your eating habits. With the help of the **books of Joanna Kortink** you will be able to tackle your eating habits, one step at a time.

1. Anger

Claudette:

I am angry with my boyfriend. He was going to cook a healthy meal but he did the complete opposite. Because I was angry, I threw up everything afterwards.

As is the case with fear, there also seems to be a strong connection between anger and eating. Here it is also possible that there is a direct connection between anger and eating but there are often deeper feelings of anger which are related to eating.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?
Check off the statements that you recognize.

- when I am angry, I am extremely inclined to eat
- when I am angry, I have the tendency to eat very fast
- when I am angry, I eat much more than I planned
- If I become angry during a meal, I don't finish what is on my plate
- I am afraid to express my anger out of fear that others will become even angrier with me
- I am afraid to express my anger, because I am afraid that others will no longer accept me
- Instead of expressing feelings of anger, I have learned to keep them inside.

Perhaps you have other feelings of anger which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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- Stop reading or writing for a minute and follow your breathing. What are you feeling right now? Focus your attention on that without changing anything.

2. Disappointment

Julie:

I thought my girlfriend understood when I finally summed up the courage to tell her about my eating problems, but that wasn't so. She judged me by saying that I was stupid. This wasn't the reaction that I was expecting. I already judge myself daily. I was truly disappointed with our friendship.

Expectations can really throw you off balance. If, for example, you are really happy that a loved one is coming over and he cancels, you can become very disappointed. To comfort yourself, you perhaps decide to have a delicious snack.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?
Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I often find it difficult to allow myself to feel feelings of disappointment
- when I feel disappointed, I have the tendency to eat
- when I am disappointed, I often eat something
- when I feel disappointed, I don't feel like eating at all
- If someone disappoints me, I feel rejected
- If someone disappoints me, I think it is my fault
- If I don't do something well, I am disappointed in myself

Perhaps you have other feelings of disappointment which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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3. Fear

Fran:

I am afraid to eat, because then I will gain weight. I am afraid that my rolls of fat will become visible. I fear that it will never be alright.

Very often this fear of putting on weight has a deeper founded fear of being rejected by others.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?
Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I am afraid of gaining weight
- I am afraid of getting fat
- I am afraid that my clothes won't fit anymore.

- I am afraid that if I gain weight that others will be critical of me.
- I am afraid that if I gain weight that others will reject me.
- I am afraid that if I gain weight I will no longer be attractive.
- I am afraid that if I gain weight that my partner will leave me.

Perhaps you have other fears which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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4. Fear of failure and perfectionism

Maria:

By trying to meet other people's expectations, I hoped I would get more positive attention. I longed to be noticed by others. But however hard I tried, it was of no use. Regrettably, I realized too late that this striving for perfection would not take me to where I longed to be: recognition and attention for who I really was.

Perfectionism often goes hand in hand with strong self-criticism. The fear that you will fail in the eyes of the other is often hidden behind this perfection; you are therefore afraid of rejection. This perfectionism also plays a role in the quest for weight loss: it's never good enough; there is always room for improvement.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?
Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I want to excel in everything
- I often think that what I do, I should do better
- I am often afraid that I won't do things right
- I am afraid of rejection and criticism
- I am very critical of myself
- I am very afraid of failure
- I often hear negative voices in my head

Perhaps you have other feelings of perfectionism and fear of failure which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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- Stop reading or writing for a minute and follow your breathing. What are you feeling right now? Focus your attention on that without changing anything.

5. Feelings of guilt

Annemarie:

I feel guilty because I have ruined my life as a result of eating issues. I also feel guilty towards those around me.

With feelings of shame, you feel like you are judged by others but with feelings of guilt you are judging yourself. Feelings of guilt are related to regret, for example if you have eaten too much. Feelings of guilt can occur after you have eaten too much, or after a binge, or after vomiting and using laxatives. Feelings of guilt can also occur if you have had eating problems and weights problems for several years.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?
Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I feel guilty if I eat more than I planned
- I often feel guilty after binge-eating
- I feel guilty about my eating habits
- I feel guilty about my weight
- I feel guilty because I continue to cling to my eating habits
- I feel guilty toward others because of my eating problem
- I feel guilty because of all the time I waste on eating and weight problems

Perhaps you have other feelings of guilt which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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- Stop reading or writing for a minute and follow your breathing. What are you feeling right now? Focus your attention on that without changing anything.

6. Helplessness

Catherine:

I don't know how to get out of this. I can't do it. It has often failed. I no longer have the confidence that it will work.

Sheer helplessness can make you reach for food. Powerlessness is a crippling emotion that contributes to your unwillingness to do anything. This emotion goes hand in hand with all kinds of sabotaging thoughts.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?
Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I often find it difficult to allow myself to feel feelings of helplessness
- if something goes wrong at school or work I usually feel helpless
- I regularly have the feeling that I won't succeed in doing something
- when I feel helpless I usually reach for food
- I sometimes stuff myself out of sheer helplessness
- I often have no control over my eating habits and that makes me feel helpless
- If I no longer have control over my eating, I feel completely helpless

Perhaps you have other feelings of helplessness which are related to eating but are not in this test.
If you do, write them down.

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- Stop reading or writing for a minute and follow your breathing. What are you feeling right now? Focus your attention on that without changing anything.

7. Insecurity

Wendy:

I am afraid to express my emotions. I feel insecure about what might come into the open. I don't think that my boyfriend will appreciate all of this. In the past it has been very intense. That's when I started to subdue my emotions by eating.

If you conform to the expectations of others you are rewarded with compliments, approval and acceptance. Because of this, you become very dependent on others for their acceptance. In the long run you lose sight of your own feelings and needs. This can result in the development of a pseudo-self. Deep inner feelings are not expressed and remain invisible to the outside world.

To what degree do you recognize the following statements?

Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I often feel insecure
- I have very little self-esteem
- I often conform to the expectations of others
- I find it difficult to deal with criticism
- I try to avoid being criticized by others
- I often do things to please others
- I am afraid to show my true feelings

Perhaps you have other feelings of insecurity which are related to eating but are not in this test.

If you do, write them down.

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● Stop reading or writing for a minute and follow your breathing. What are you feeling right now?

Focus your attention on that without changing anything.

8. Loneliness

Mandy

I feel lonely. I don't get out except when I go out for groceries. I don't even have the energy to call or to send someone an email anyone. I watch TV every day. Food is my only friend.

When people feel lonely, they often look to food for comfort. Here it is also possible that there is a direct correlation between loneliness and eating but there are often deeper feelings involved.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?

Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I often find it difficult to allow myself to feel feelings of loneliness
- when I feel lonely, I feel a strong urge to eat
- when I feel lonely, I comfort myself with food
- when I feel lonely, I think that others don't need me
- If I feel lonely, it is because others don't accept me
- when I feel lonely, I feel rejected by others
- when I feel lonely, I think that people don't like me

Perhaps you have other feelings of loneliness which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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9. Sadness

Virginia:

Today I cried because I was out of control again. I feel sad because I can't cope with my eating habits.

Sadness is a feeling that occurs when we lose a loved one.

But small things in our daily lives can cause us to feel sadness as well. It could be an appointment that has been canceled or a job that fell through, or because you didn't succeed at something even though you did your best.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?

Check off the statements that you recognize.

- if something negative happens to me, it often makes me feel sad
- it is often hard for me to accept sadness
- I often have difficulty expressing feelings of sadness
- if I allow myself to feel feelings of sadness, then I have no more control over myself
- if I feel sad, I can't eat a single bite of food
- if I feel sad, I feel really empty and have a strong urge to eat
- if I am sad, food is the only thing that can comfort me

Perhaps you have other feelings of sadness which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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10. Shame

Marion:

I am ashamed of my body, especially my belly and my thighs. They are so obscenely fat. I try to hide them but when I see someone looking at them I feel very ashamed. At a moment like this, I wish I were invisible. My mother thinks I shouldn't exaggerate, but she has no idea how much I am ashamed of my body.

A lot of people with eating and weight problems have strong feelings of shame; shame about their bodies, shame about their eating habits and shame about something they have done. People who have feelings of shame want to keep themselves hidden from others. Shame is related to fear of rejection and judgment by others.

Do you recognize yourself in the following statements?

Check off the statements that you recognize.

- I am often ashamed of my figure
- I am often ashamed of my weight

- There are certain parts of my body which I am often ashamed of
- Because I am ashamed, I am afraid to go to the spa or to go swimming
- I am often ashamed of my eating habits
- If other people see my body they will give me disapproving looks
- If other people see me eat, they will think badly of me

Perhaps you have other feelings of shame which are related to eating but are not in this test. If you do, write them down.

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- Stop reading or writing for a minute and follow your breathing. What are you feeling right now? Focus your attention on that without changing anything.