What is emotional eating?

Emotional eating means that you eat for reasons other than hunger. You may eat because you're sad, stressed, or lonely or you may use food as a reward. Food can be soothing and distract you from what's really bothering you. As an emotional eater, you may not listen to your body's natural hunger and fullness signals. This can interfere with making healthy food choices.

What are signs of emotional eating?
If you notice that you often reach for food out of boredom or for comfort, you may be eating for emotional reasons.
Common signs of emotional eating are:
- ☐ Changing your eating habits when you have more stress in your life.
- ☐ Eating when you are not hungry or when you are full.
- ☐ Eating to avoid dealing with a stressful situation.
- ☐ Eating to soothe your feelings.
- ☐ Using food as a reward. (For example, "That was really a tough job/assignment/argument. I need some ice cream/candy/popcorn!")

What are some ways to deal with emotional eating?
1. Identify your emotional eating triggers by keeping a food journal.
2. Use a hunger scale. Learn how to tell the difference between true, physical hunger and hunger that's really just in your head.
3. Change your usual response to stress and other triggers.

When you start to recognize your emotional eating triggers, you can change the way you respond to them. Instead of reaching for a candy bar or bag of chips to soothe your emotions, try these ideas instead:
- ☐ Take a short relaxation break.
- ☐ Take time to stop and think about what is really bothering you and how you could deal with it.
- ☐ Change what you're doing. Take a short walk down the hall or around the block.
- ☐ Call a friend.
- ☐ If you are truly hungry, reach for a healthy meal or snack. Focus on the experience of eating, and enjoy your food.

If you feel like you need more help, talk to a Dietician or contact EASE at 1-800-882-1341 to explore your emotions and eating habits.

"Strength is the courage…to reach out!"