Self-help for emotional eating

Changing your relationship with food

A practical guide inspired by psychotherapeutic practice

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Who is this ebook for

People who know (more or less) which foods are good for them, but eat more or unhealthier than planned due to:

- emotional eating
- poor self-image
- long terms effects of repeated diets
- food addiction
- lack of time
- misunderstanding food quality
- trauma history
- harmful eating habits
- binge eating

I will not focus on medication available for weight loss, please see your doctor for those options

Who this ebook is NOT for

People who know (more or less) which foods are good for them and have no difficulties eating as planned. I am referring to those people who learnt about healthy eating or a particular diet, planned it and followed the plan without any difficulty.

Well done to you and thank you for reading this far, you don't need to read the rest of the ebook!

(If you feel bad for not being like that, don't. This is very rare in real life; some people on social media seem to be like that, but we can never be sure about the life behind the online persona. Most people like to eat and this is ok)

People with severe restrictive eating disorders are less likely to benefit, but some strategies may be useful. However, in this case, specialised services are a better option.

If you are struggling with an eating disorder, please speak to your GP or contact Beat, the UK eating disorder charity.

About the author

Who am I and why do I write on the topic?

I am a Consultant in Medical Psychotherapy and General Adult Psychiatry.

"Medical psychotherapy" involves training in several psychotherapy modalities. My main therapy modality is psychodynamic psychotherapy, but I worked and trained in other modalities, such as dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT), EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing), systemic therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and several others.

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I am interested in health, including fitness, healthy eating, and longevity science. I am also interested in applying psychotherapy ideas outside of the psychotherapy setting.

In this e-book, I combined my psychotherapy knowledge with my hobbies for health, looking at ways to use psychotherapy skills to gain freedom from unhelpful eating habits and cravings.

I aim to popularise psychotherapy knowledge outside of the therapy room.

Introduction

Food is used not just to nourish our bodies and for survival but for many other reasons, such as managing **our feelings**.

We may know rationally which foods are good for us and which are not, but from knowing to making changes is a long way.
There are many "diets" available and most of them work. However, any diet followed by a return to a previous way of eating leads to weight gain. The result is an overall increase in weight, frustration and poor self-esteem, as the "diet" fails.

Lasting change comes from changing the way we eat for good, not from short-term diets. Dieting alone makes such changes very hard to implement, as hunger, cravings and feelings can get the best of us. We need to learn to manage our emotions in other ways than through eating.

We can apply some psychological techniques to look at alternative coping strategies and to understand more about ourselves and our relationship with food.

You'll likely find one or two strategies more valuable and resonate less with others. That's ok. It may remain like that, or different methods may become helpful later.

This e-book focuses on the psychology of eating, not on a particular diet or lifestyle.

This e-book is about understanding yourself, your feelings, what role food serves in your life and how you can break free from that.

How to use this e-book

This e-book is a collection of strategies to use to manage emotional eating. By “emotional eating”, I mean eating as a coping strategy when facing difficult feelings or even boredom. It may not be obvious that we eat emotionally at first, but observation and introspection (and honesty with ourselves) help identify the underlying reasons.

It is written as a workbook with practical steps to follow.

I didn’t include the science, research or a long introduction, as I want this resource to be as practical as possible.
We live in a world with an overabundance of resources, and we may feel lost in the amount of information. I summarised the techniques that I found most helpful; most of them are translatable for other difficulties apart from emotional eating.

In my clinical work, I see people who like a structured approach, with clear goals and tasks between sessions. But I also see people who would like to have the space to explore their internal world and better understand themselves. Therefore, I included approaches from a wide range of psychotherapies, and if you resonate with one or another, it can be a good first step towards that approach, which you may want to deepen with further resources or decide to find a psychotherapist.

The strategies described can be used as “self-help”. You need to read each technique and practise it several times until you feel you have mastered it. Don’t decide that it doesn’t work before trying. Like any therapy strategy, it’s easier to implement if working with a psychotherapist. However, most psychotherapists don’t work in all the therapy models listed; you may need to select the ideas you resonate with and find someone who works along those lines.

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Let’s start with food judgements

If you ever call food “good”, “bad”, or “junk”, you may extend these judgements to yourself, call yourself those words when you eat one or the other.

Unhealthy or “junk” food serves a purpose for you: it may not be nutritional but emotional.

In some diet programmes, food can be called "sins" or other unhelpful terms, or "treats" for children. This perpetuates an unhealthy relationship with food, as it implies that we are "sinners" for eating "sins" or that if we achieve something, we deserve "treats."

Even the most unhealthy food can have temporary benefits; nothing is entirely good or bad.

Practice
Start by noticing how you describe food. If you catch yourself calling food in derogatory terms, notice that.
Next, call the food for what it does for you. For example, “This food gives my body the nutrition or fuel that it needs” or “This food has low nutritional value but is helping me cope with anxiety” (rather than “I ate good food or junk food”).



Mindfulness

In short, what is mindfulness?

It is about being fully present in the NOW, noticing reality as it is. Our thoughts usually go to a thousand different places, but mindfulness is about returning your mind to the activity or experience you want to focus on.

We can get better at being mindful by practising it regularly. You don't need to spend long periods (unless you want to), but you can integrate it into your daily life.



Mindfulness

Here are a few **exercises** that you can practise "**on the go**", as part of your day-to-day activities:

1. When you brush your teeth or shower, practise focusing on the physical sensations and the action you are performing. Your mind will likely want to go somewhere else but bring it back to what you set as the focus of attention.

2. Practise being mindful when you go for a walk. Notice nature, feel the breeze, or focus on your body movements. Practise bringing your attention back to the set focus.

3. Yoga (or other exercise) mindfulness. Focus your mind on how your body feels and work on keeping your attention focused on body movements.

4. When you go to bed, scan your body for a few seconds and then focus your attention on your breath. Notice your in-breath and out-breath, without trying to change it. If it's easier, count the breaths up to 10. Your mind will likely wander, but practise bringing it back to breathing. End with another body scan before drifting to sleep.



Mindfulness

How does mindfulness benefit eating?



It is beneficial for people who eat large quantities over a short amount of time. It's also helpful for people who multitask, eating and working simultaneously, eating and scrolling online or watching TV.

The idea is that if we don't focus on the meal, we are disconnected from how the food feels and we miss the satiety signals; we can eat a whole meal without realising how it tastes.

We eat more than the body needs by eating quickly (before the brain can get the message that we are full) and being distracted.

Mindful eating helps us to connect with our body and its nutritional needs.

Other benefits:

- We get to enjoy the food we eat, its taste and texture (let's not forget that food can bring us joy)
- It's also good for stress reduction, as it's a chance to slow down and reduce the tension in our bodies and minds

Mindfulness

How to practise mindful eating?

Step one – food-related mindfulness

1. Sit down at a table while eating (if there is no other way than to eat on the go, make that an exception)

2. Eliminate distractions (laptop, phone, TV)

3. Place the food on a plate, arrange it nicely and appreciate it. If you're into photography, you can even take pictures!

4. Notice the foods' colours, aromas and textures. Think if it needs any additional seasonings. Eat slowly, chewing each bite a few times and focus on the taste and texture. Try to notice the ingredients of the meal and how the different flavourings mix.

5. When your mind wanders, bring your attention back to the food.



Mindfulness

How to practise mindful eating?

Step one – food-related mindfulness

Practise mindfulness while eating, for at least a week before moving to the next step



Mindfulness

How to practise mindful eating?

Step two – reconnecting with hunger and body needs

1. When you master the above, and it has become your usual way of eating, add body mindfulness.

2. Before step one, notice how your body feels and the hunger sensation. Or is it a craving for something pleasant rather than hunger? Whatever it is, explore it and sit with that feeling.

3. Do step one while also noticing your body. Notice the sensations of satisfying hunger or feeling full. If there are any associated feelings, experience them without judgment.

You may start to notice that you want to eat when you are upset or bored and not because you are hungry. This doesn't mean that your habits will change overnight, but change is more likely to occur if preceded by an understanding of current behaviour.

This takes us to the next step.

Self-exploration

What do I mean?

I am referring to **being aware of your feelings and thoughts** before eating.
The mindfulness above helps to notice them.

What happens before you eat? What is the feeling? Is it hunger, or is it anger, upset, or boredom? Whatever it is, notice it without being harsh on yourself. You may start noticing patterns.

What kind of feeling triggers what kind of craving? What's the thought and action before the feeling? It may be that a specific life event always leads to a particular feeling (e.g. stress after a long day at work)
It's easier to keep track if you keep a diary.

An example is on the next page, but you can create your own or print this one.



Time	Location, what you are doing	Hunger rating before eating (1-10)	Feelings and thoughts before eating	Food eaten	Hunger rating after eating (1-10)	Feelings and thoughts after eating	Other reflections

Self-exploration

What's the feeling driving the food craving?

Start a food diary when you expect a "typical week" ahead of you, with a usual weekly pattern. Don't choose a week when you are on holiday, although you may have more time to record.
Ideally, record after each meal and snack but if you don't have time allocate some time in the evening to record the whole day.
If you forget to record one day, skip that one, as long as it was a "typical day" and not a day when you ate more than usual.

Spend at least a week recording the food & feelings, then start looking at the recorded data in detail.



Self-exploration

What's the feeling driving the food craving?

The idea is to be aware of your feelings and their impact on your eating patterns.

You may notice that you are more likely to overeat when upset or drawn toward sweet things when anxious. **By noticing, you will identify the emotional need**. The next step would be to find more strategies to help with those feelings so that food is not the primary coping mechanism.

In many cases, stopping and noticing the feeling helps reduce food cravings. **By identifying the feeling behind the need, the food’s power over our emotions lessens and we gain more control.**

It is not about stopping yourself from eating it. Trying to forbid certain foods makes it more likely to crave them and perpetuates an unhealthy relationship with food. You can tell yourself that you stop and reflect for a minute about the triggers and then you can have it if you still want it.

Let's now look at some **common feelings associated with emotional eating.** Read the ones that apply to you, based on the self-exploration done so far. Skip the irrelevant ones.

Self-exploration
Stress

Food used for comfort and temporary relief to manage stress.

Alternative: focus on strategies to reduce and manage stress during the day, such as

- Regular breaks to breathe deeply and slowly for a minute. Focus on having longer out-breaths than in-breaths, with abdominal breathing.
- Stretching in the longer breaks. When you get a break, move your body and if you feel stiff, do some self-massage or gentle stretches.
- Make sure that you have regular self-care routines
- Walking or other physical activities can also be very helpful in reducing stress levels;
- Talk to people about your worries and challenges
- Do regular body scans, checking in with your body. We tend to accumulate tension in our bodies when stressed. When noticing tension, aim to relax that body area, by changing position, shaking up the body, self-massage...



Self-exploration
Anxiety

Food used to calm anxiety or as a distraction.

Alternative: as above, plus

Having a range of **breathing techniques** will help to reduce anxiety “on the go”.

- Slow deep breaths, while focusing on your abdomen moving up and down and having longer out-breaths than in-breaths
- “Square breathing” – breathe in, hold, breathe out, hold.
- Humming - slow deep breathing with a “uuuu” exhale or whatever sound feels comfortable (I expect that you’ll prefer this when alone)
- Contract some muscle when you inhale (eg make a fist), relax when you exhale. You can tell yourself “relax” when you breathe out and relax your muscles

Other strategies:

- Name the anxiety when you identify it in your body, such as "it's anxiety"
- Have an awareness that anxiety is self-limiting: it goes up, then plateaus, then goes down. It shall pass
- Reframe the anxiety as excitement when relevant: "I am excited to..."
- Allocate a time of the day for worries. Write them down and think about how you can problem-solve
- Look after yourself, through movement and social time.



Self-exploration
Sadness / low mood

Eating is pleasurable, so it can help us feel better when sad or low.

Alternative: think about other activities that make you feel better.



- An idea is to have a list in your mind or on your phone, that you can access when you're feeling sad. Can you call or text a friend, or listen to a song? Anything that brings you joy.
- Seek support from family or friends
- It may seem counter-intuitive, but going for a walk may help.
- Another strategy is to write down your feelings; maybe they are trying to signal something to you. You may be in a situation that can be improved and thinking about the problem is the first step.
- Maybe therapy can help, especially if it's a recurrent feeling or you've experienced a low mood for a while.
- If you have been feeling low for more than 2 weeks, see your doctor in case you need treatment for depression

Self-exploration
Loneliness & boredom

Loneliness - Food to fill an emotional void.

Alternative: you may know that the way out is by finding “your tribe”.

- Think about all the places where you can find people in your local area: walking groups, Yoga classes, meeting up apps, kids’ school events, neighbours, work, etc.
- Volunteer with a charity part of the week.
- Re-connect with friends or family that you lost contact with

Boredom - Food can give us something to do, to fill the time.

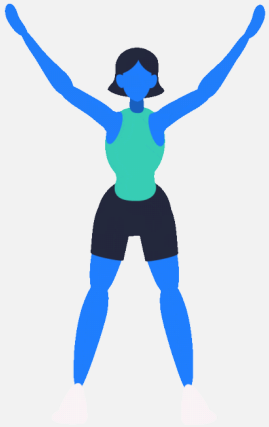
Alternative: some of the alternatives above can help.
Other ideas:

- Find a hobby, by thinking about the things you enjoy or used to enjoy as a child but gave up when life got too busy.
- Get into a sport. It will give you plenty of things to focus on and you’ll be left with very limited time to get bored.
- Do something enjoyable



Self-exploration
Anger

Some people can find food calming, especially if they were left angry in a situation where they couldn't stand up for their cause. Food provides comfort but won't help you learn from the situation.



Alternatives:

- Go for a brisk walk or run. It will help you with your feelings and process what happened. A few sprints, running as fast as you can, will decrease the buildup of negative energy. If that's not an option, try some "jumping jacks" at home
- Talk with a friend about the situation to "let off steam"
- Write in a journal
- Practise some of the breathing strategies described on previous pages
- Use the anger constructively for action, if possible. Can you say what you disagree with and how it can be sorted? Anger is not bad as a feeling unless associated with destructive behaviour. Use it to better the situation.



Self-exploration

Happiness and celebration of positive life events

In many cultures (or all?) celebration involves food. Lots of it. If the reasons for the celebrations are few and far between, I wouldn't change anything. It's not the rare events that impact our health so much, but the daily habits.
However, if the celebrations are quite frequent or if you want to prioritise healthy foods, here are some ideas:

- Start with proteins and veggies
- Eat slowly and focus on socialising rather than eating.
- If you eat dessert, eat it after the meal, not between meals. If there are fruit options, go for that.
- Move after a big meal. Either walk around to talk to people, or dance if it's that kind of celebration. If stuck behind a table, you can do calf raises.
- If the event involves sandwiches only, you remove the top bread and eat only the lower one (if culturally appropriate): your plate may look messy, but we shouldn't feel obliged to eat in a way that's not beneficial to us.

Overall, have fun above anything else!



Address the underlying trauma

This is not easy to explain in an e-book, and some people may need therapy or help from a psychotherapist.

In some cases, it's about underlying childhood trauma. Some examples are: unhealthy relationships with food when bullied as children for being "fat" or forced to eat when they didn't want to; sometimes, it is about sexual abuse trauma and an unconscious decision to become unattractive or big as a way to avoid unwanted attention.

It is hard to address eating difficulties when the underlying trauma is not addressed. In therapy, the person needs to reach a sense of freedom from the past, where they can take their own decisions in the here and now.

Each person's story is different, and there isn't one approach that fits all.

If trauma impacts your eating and body image, the best thing you can do is to have psychotherapy. If you can't afford it, here are some suggestions, as self-help strategies.

The previously described exercises about being mindful of what triggers eating are a good first step. It brings more self-awareness.

Address the underlying trauma

After you identify the feelings, learn to tolerate them. You may need to distract yourself when the intensity is too high or you need to remain socially functional, but the overall aim is to learn to “sit with them”

When you feel strong enough emotionally to allow your feelings to come without the need to distract, you will start learning from them. Try to allow your feelings and thoughts to wander. Either write without any agenda or speak into a recording app, or just by yourself. Allow whatever comes and see where it takes you.
If it takes you to dark places (abuse, trauma), ground yourself by noticing the present moment (focus on breathing or the things around you). Tell yourself that this is stuff from the past and that you are safe now.

DEAR DIARY

You can also do imagery exercises, building a compassionate image or place (as in Compassion-Focused Therapy) to help increase self-compassion. Examples are below.



Address the underlying trauma

Building a compassionate image for ourselves

For this exercise, find a comfortable position and practise slow breathing, aiming for a calm state of mind. Think about the attributes of compassion: wise, strong, warm, understanding, and non-judgmental. Slowly create an image in your mind, of someone or something wise, non-judgemental, who has an accepting attitude towards you, who you feel can accept you for who you are, even if they knew your darkest secrets.

If you are unfamiliar with using imagery, creating this image may take a few attempts. Try to have a complete picture, seeing the shape, expression, size, colours, and tone of voice. You may use the memory of someone you know who was compassionate towards you but it needs to be someone fully accepting and non-judgemental.
Play around with creating this image. After you build it, you can use it whenever you need it, when you are harsh towards yourself or feel down, unaccepted, or unloved.



Address the underlying trauma

Building a safe place

This exercise is similar in the sense that it also involves imagery. Find a comfortable position and practise slow, deep breathing. When you are relaxed, imagine a safe place where you can feel safe, calm and peaceful. Imagine the place in great detail: what does it look like? What colours can you see? What sounds can you hear? Is there anyone else around? Focus on how you feel, on sensations associated with the place, such as the sun on your face or the air breeze. Allow any body tension to melt and continue to breathe slowly. You may associate this place with a gesture or a smell to help take you back to the safe place in the future (for example, using aromatherapy while you do the practice of touching your fingers together when you reach a safe feeling)
You can recreate this imagery to bring back the feelings of safety; in subsequent practices, it will be quicker.



Address the underlying trauma

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing)

EMDR is an established, evidence-based therapy for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and NICE recommends it for adults with PTSD. It can also help with other painful memories that keep affecting how we feel and behave in the present, including memories linked to eating.

In EMDR, you briefly focus on a painful memory while doing "bilateral stimulation": eye movements, tapping or sounds that alternate from side to side. Over the course of therapy, the memory usually becomes less distressing and feels more like part of the past.

Why it needs a therapist

Working directly on painful memories can stir up strong feelings, sometimes more than we expect. A trained EMDR therapist first helps you build ways to stay grounded, then guides the processing at a safe pace and makes sure each session ends with you feeling settled. For this reason, I don't recommend using EMDR on painful memories by yourself.

To find an accredited EMDR therapist in the UK, see the EMDR Association UK directory.

Address the underlying trauma

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) -cont'

A calming exercise you can try: the butterfly hug

This exercise uses bilateral stimulation to soothe, not to process memories.

1. Sit comfortably and cross your arms over your chest, so each hand rests just below the opposite collarbone.
2. Breathe slowly, with longer out-breaths than in-breaths.
3. Gently tap your hands, alternating left and right, at a slow, steady pace.
4. Bring to mind your safe place or compassionate image from the previous pages, and notice any sense of calm in your body.
5. Continue for a minute or two, then stop and notice how you feel.

If unpleasant memories come up, stop tapping, open your eyes and ground yourself in the present by noticing your breathing and the things around you.

Finding an EMDR therapist

In the UK, the EMDR Association UK keeps a directory of accredited therapists. You can also ask your GP whether EMDR is available locally on the NHS.

Work on self-acceptance

It’s important not to see yourself as “a before” version of yourself, the one you dislike. Given your early life and your social circumstances, you are the best version of yourself now

You are the best version of yourself now.

Fully embrace this idea and appreciate yourself and your life story as it is. Improvement and growth are always possible, but they can start from a place of being ok with the present.

What we are trying to achieve is acceptance and change at the same time. Acceptance without improvement can lead to feeling stuck and stagnation; focusing on change alone suggests that we are not ok the way we are. I find that acceptance with action towards change is the middle path towards improving the status quo.

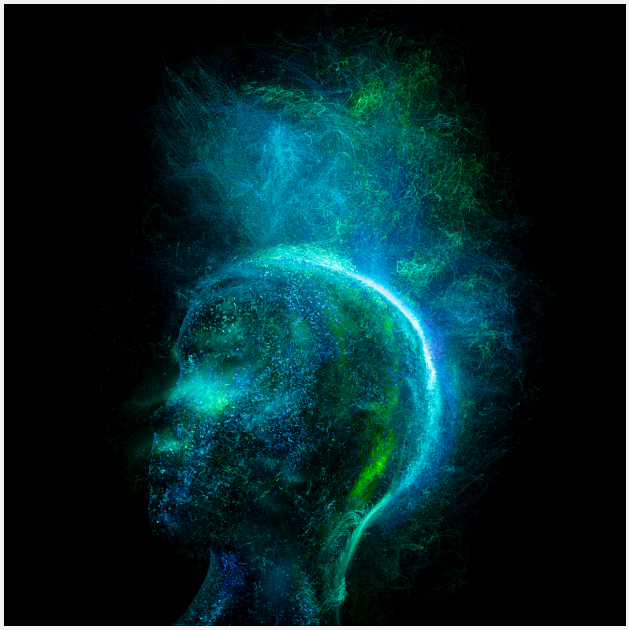


Imagery

Imagery techniques are used in different forms of counselling, therapy and sport coaching. If you imagine something in great detail, including the visual aspect, the step-by-step details, and the feelings associated, it helps your brain get ready for that activity. And it prepares you for it.

You may have heard of athletes who use imagery to prepare for a race or event. I use it before long runs or when I want to challenge my limits. I imagine what I am going to do in great detail, including the pain and the possibility of wanting to give up (as I know it's very likely, so better to prepare to overcome it). I imagine how I motivate myself and go past that and continue running. It helps if I imagine the route, clothing and other details so it's as specific as possible.

You can use the technique with any action that you want to make a habit of.



Imagery

Some examples of using imagery:

- Imagine in detail how you fuel your body with nutritious food that you eat when hungry, slowly and in an enjoyable way. You can go further and imagine how the food is nourishing your body and mind.

- Imagine yourself becoming more physically active. Start by setting realistic goals, and then visualise yourself taking the first steps and how you feel about that.

- You can imagine how you get tired at the end of the day and you listen to some nice song and relax your body and mind (instead of resorting to food for comfort).

- In case of trauma (if therapy is not available), imagine the adult you comforting the younger, helpless child version of you. Imagine yourself giving comfort to the younger you. It may feel very difficult to do this exercise; start by gentle acknowledgement and work towards encouragement, praise and love to the younger you. This last example is more challenging; practice after imagery becomes easy for you, and you have made some progress.

- You can practise any desired behaviour change that you want to make. It helps to make it easier to implement new behaviours, as your brain has already rehearsed the steps needed.

Imagery

Have different versions of you work together

Often, when we think about the younger us, we can be surprised by some of our decisions or behaviours.
The same will apply in the future. The future self may be surprised by some of the choices you make now. I am proposing an exercise to use this for your benefit.

The exercise involves a few steps:

1. Allocate at least 10 minutes to practise
2. Find a comfortable position, in a room where you won't be disturbed. Have 2 chairs or two sitting places available.
3. Start by breathing slowly a few times, to be in a calm state of mind
4. Based on what you know about health and the impact of lifestyle choices on long-term health, imagine a version of you 10 years older.
5. What do you think the older version of you is like? Wiser? Try to imagine in great detail the older you. Will you have more health, energy, connections, peace? Try to imagine the older you in detail and realistically, based on the lifestyle choices you make now. How easily do they move, climb stairs or play with others? How do they sleep? Do they need medication for conditions such as high blood pressure?
6. Now step into the role of the older you. Move to the other chair or seat available and stay there for a minute, trying to get into the role. Try to include as many details as possible.
7. From that place, your older self, look towards your current self. Give yourself advice that feels relevant. Tell your current self what it feels like to be older with the health consequences of lifestyle choices. Ask your current self what you can do now to help the older self have a better life.

Imagery



To take the exercise further, you can write a letter to the current self, from the older self.
Put in a letter everything you'd like the current you to do so that the older version of you has a better life.



Reduce food addiction

This seems more about food than about the psychology of food. However, there is a limit to what we can achieve with our minds if the food is created in such a way as to increase our desire to eat, decrease our satiety signals and make us crave it again and again.

I am talking about "ultra-processed food". In short, it means industrially made food with a long list of added substances, which are only possible to recognise if you have a PhD in nutrition or have studied the topic intensively. These foods usually have a perfect balance between sweet and salty taste, crispiness and softness. The ultra-processed food is usually packed in nicely coloured bags, which are hard to resist when opened.

If you find it hard to stop when you start eating such food, you don't have a weakness or lack of motivation.

This food is designed to make people crave it and eat it in large amounts!

There is no way around this, other than prioritising home-cooked food!

If we buy ingredients and cook our meals, we will definitely avoid ultra-processed foods.
If this is impossible for you due to time and/or money constraints, make sure that you choose foods with the smallest number of ingredients possible.
Don't worry if you can't avoid ultra-processed foods all the time. The idea is to reduce as much as you can. It is (almost) impossible to eliminate them.

Behavioural strategies

(environment)

This is a more frequently described strategy.
In summary it means, "out of sight, out of mind".
So arranging your environment in such a way that access to healthy options is easy and less healthy alternatives are less available. If the biscuits and cakes are on the counter or in the office, you are way more likely to eat them than if you need to go to the shop to purchase them.

A few techniques to help with behavioural strategies:

- Make sure your fridge and cupboard contain foods that you want to eat.

- Plan what you are going to eat for the day and have everything ready or within reach. Pack your lunch or make sure that it's within easy reach.

- Tell your friends and family that you are opting for healthier food options. Ideally, the family should join in, it would make everything easier for you!

- Go food shopping after you eat so you don't impulsively shop for what you don't want out of hunger. Have a list at hand.

- Follow people with similar interests online. This can be tricky as there are "diet wars" out there, but a few reasonable people can be inspiring. Receiving messages about improving your health regularly can reinforce your behaviours

- Eat together with family (if applicable), and focus on enjoying the meal and the time together. By cooking together as a family, healthy eating will come naturally and it will be fun!

Behavioural strategies

Using knowledge and imagery to inform our behaviour

Learning about ultra-processed foods (UPFs), and their role in increasing all-cause mortality and obesity may help you find it easier to stay away from them.
Highly processed "food" is produced by mixing low-quality ingredients and adding emulsifiers, taste agents, sugar, salt, and colourings to make it tasty and addictive.
You may find it helpful to watch a few YouTube videos about how UPFs are created or read the book "Ultra Processed People" by Chris van Tulleken.
When you know and can picture the process, the UPFs can become quite disgusting or at least, less desirable. You are more likely to see them as a combination of substances rather than nutritious food. They mess up our senses and satiety hormones, making us eat more than we need.

For example, did you know that Procter and Gamble argued in court that the Pringles are not potato crisps, as the content of potatoes was low? They described the process of making them, as a dough and adding many chemical substances for taste, texture, colour, etc.
The whole process sounds very artificial and chemical to me and it completely removed any pleasure I had while eating them, as I can't unsee that mental image I created.

This can be useful in the case of highly processed, unhealthy products that don't bring any nutritional benefit, but are created for "pleasure" and to increase the revenue of the producers.

You can do the opposite with nutritional foods; learn about the various nutrients and vitamins they contain and picture how they support your body's functions.

Expectation effect

This is a more bizarre phenomenon.

Research suggests that if you think that you eat "diet", or "low calorie" food, you are more likely to feel unsatisfied and get hungrier quicker. If you believe that you had a satisfying meal, your appetite is more satisfied, even if the food is identical to the one in the example above. This is another reason why diets don't work. They create feelings of being deprived and unsatisfied, which will catch up with us through food cravings.

You don’t need “diets”, but a way of eating that is helpful for your health.

Also, when you tell yourself and close ones that you are on a “diet”, you create the expectation that the diet has an end date, followed by a return to your usual way of eating.



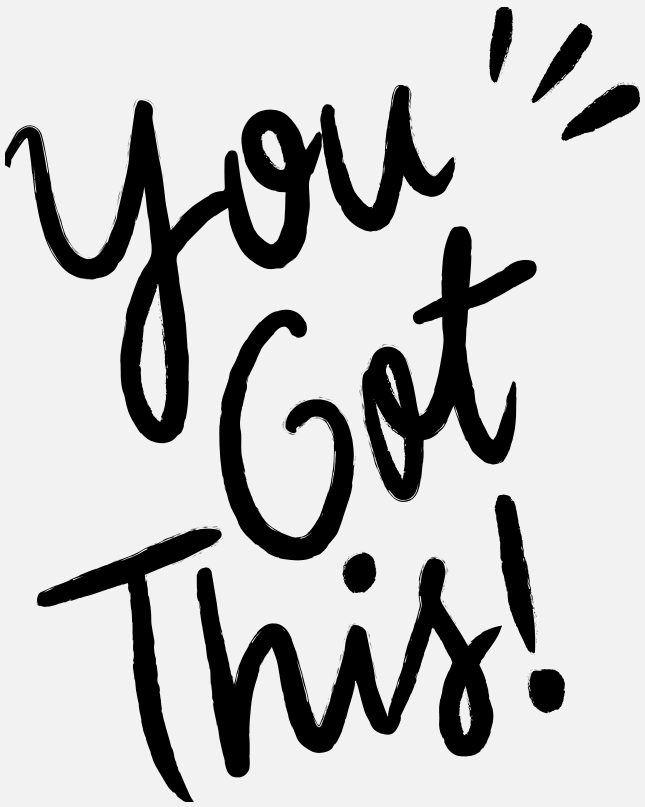
You can see the same food both as satiating or “diet” food and the resulting sensation will differ

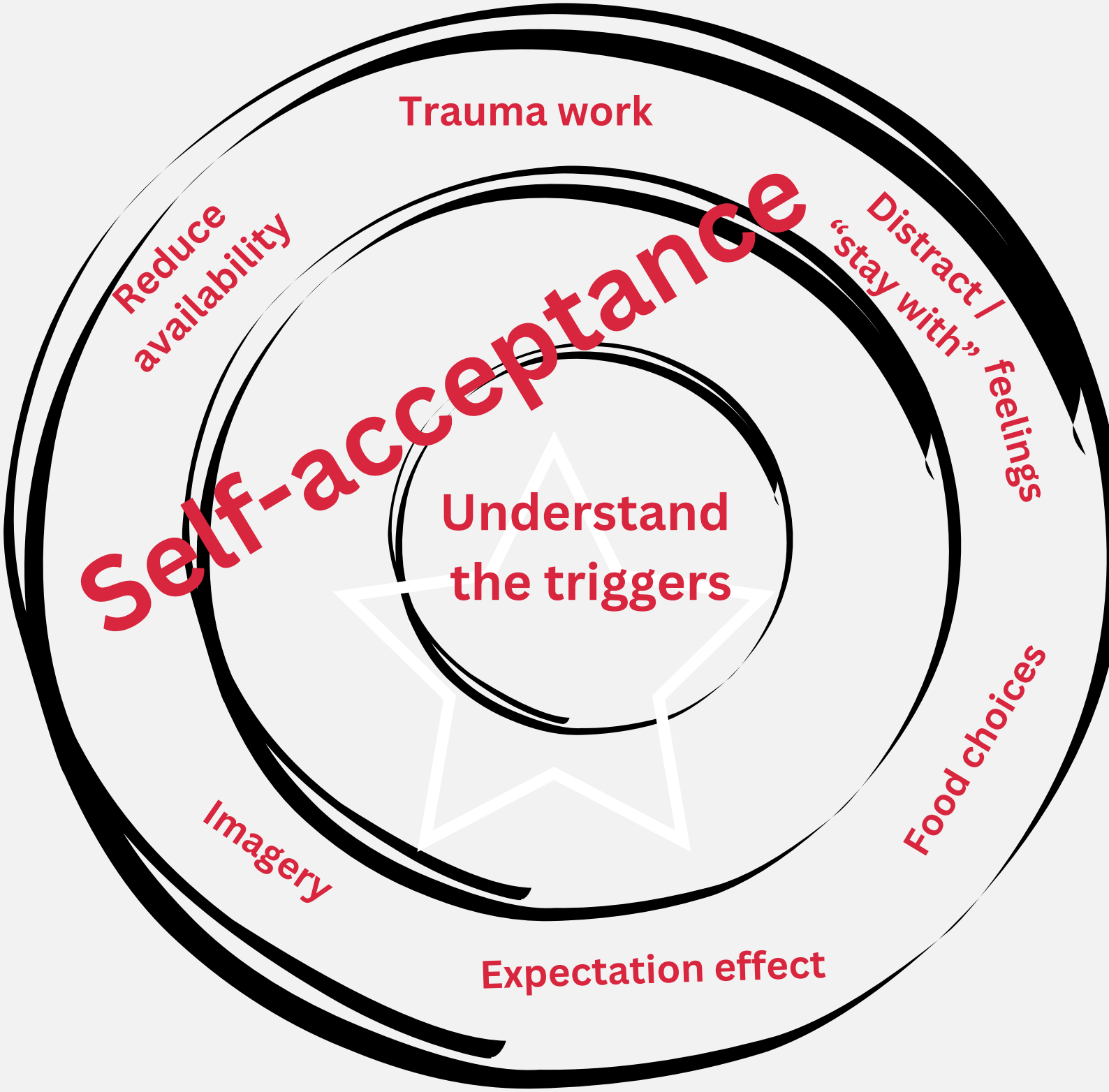
Expectation effect
-self-talk-

So self-acceptance and acceptance that food is essential for survival and health are key! You don’t need “diets”, but a way of eating that is helpful for your health.

You are ok as you are and the food you eat fuels your body or nourishes you (choose the self-talk that best fits your language)

You don't need a diet but a health style that maximises your potential. See healthy options as ways to improve your life and health, not as "punishments" or "diets". See yourself as someone deserving the best for their body and mind.




Trauma work
Reduce availability
Distract / "stay with" feelings
Self-acceptance
Understand the triggers
Food choices
Imagery
Expectation effect

Summary

Summary

- **You are the best version of yourself at this stage in your life, regardless of the number on the scale.**

- **You can try several strategies to improve your relationship with food, so that food serves as nutrition, rather than comfort for difficult feelings.**

- **It is important to start from a place of self-acceptance. You can simultaneously accept the present and work towards emotional growth and self-improvement.**

- **If you are interested in accessing psychotherapy, you may start looking for a psychotherapist with training in a modality that you resonated with**

Thank you for reading!

I hope that you find these strategies helpful

I applied psychotherapy strategies in relation to eating, but the same coping strategies can be used widely in our day-to-day life



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References and signposting

This ebook was written based on the knowledge accumulated in my training, clinical practice and by reading and listening to various podcasts.

The EMDR, compassion-focused strategies, CBT, DBT and imagery were inspired by the respective training and therapy models. The ideas about acceptance/change dialectics are inspired from DBT (Dr Marsha Linehan). The CFT imagery exercises are inspired from “The Compassionate Mind” (Paul Gilbert)

The mindful eating has been described before by numerous authors and there are several books about mindful and intuitive eating. This ebook is different as it includes other strategies and I see mindful eating as a first step towards self-exploration and change.

About the concept of "the expectation effect," I heard from David Robson, from a BBC series with the same name, which is a summary of his book.

The ideas about the impact of trauma and early life experiences on the current choices are derived from psychodynamic training and clinical experience.

I regularly listen to the "Feel Better Live More" podcast which indubitably influenced my thinking. Dr Rangan Chatterjee also wrote several books about health which I recommend. The one about losing weight is called "Feel Great, Lose Weight"

I heard about "You Are Not a Before Picture" from Alex Light, who wrote a book with this title.

Most of the strategies presented are used in the respective psychotherapies. This summary is original in the sense that I applied the therapy to the way we eat, in a self-help way. As I have training in several modalities, it comprises multiple strategies.