

Patient handout:

Emotions and beliefs that can trigger eating behaviours

Sometimes, people are uncomfortable with their thoughts and feelings, and do not know how to deal with them. That can be because they were brought up in a way that did not encourage them to experience or express how they felt, and do not feel safe or able to talk about their thoughts and feelings now.

That difficulty can lead people to find other ways of coping with their feelings. Those ways include:

- bingeing and vomiting to block out emotions and thoughts
- restricting, taking laxatives and exercising compulsively to avoid feeling those emotions and thoughts in the first place

These are avoidant and safety behaviours, which we have already talked about earlier in treatment. As before, such behaviours make you feel calmer in the short term, but worse in the longer term. For example, bingeing can make you feel 'zoned out' when you were feeling angry or worried, but then you end up feeling more worried or ashamed after the binge.

The diary that you are going to keep asks you to identify the feelings and thoughts that might drive your eating behaviour. You need to do this when you first get the urge to use the behaviour, so that you can challenge your thoughts and feelings at the time. That gives you a chance to choose whether you use the eating behaviour or not.

When first completing the diary, there are two columns where you might find it hard to identify what is going on – your thoughts and your feelings. The reason that these are hard is that your eating behaviours stop you thinking the thoughts or feeling the feelings, so you find it hard to see patterns the next time round. The thoughts that are most likely to trigger binges are what are called 'core beliefs' – beliefs about who we are and how we routinely interact with the world.

Therefore, this table is a list of the type of thoughts/'core beliefs' and feelings/emotions that often trigger eating behaviours, to help you pick out the beliefs and emotions that you could enter into your diary, until you are used to spotting them yourself. Use it when you feel like using the behaviour, rather than waiting until afterwards. Most are negative in their content, though very occasionally people use eating behaviours when they cannot manage an extremely positive emotion. If you identify other thoughts or emotions that relate to you personally, please add them to the list, as that will help you to recognise your own patterns.

Core belief/thoughts
Vulnerable (fear of harm or loss)
Defectiveness (lack of worth/self-esteem, and belief that others see us the same way)
Mistrust (belief that others are not trustworthy and will do us harm)
Abandonment (fear that others will abandon us, or will disappear and let us down when we need them)
Emotional deprivation (belief that no-one will be there to support or care for us)
Social isolation (belief that we are never going to have others who want to be around us or who we can rely on)
Failure (belief that one is unable to succeed in tasks, relationships, etc.)
Dependence (belief that one cannot succeed or get by without other people to support us)
Poor self-control (belief that one cannot control one's behaviour)
Perfectionism (belief that one must always do one's best, and even that is not good enough)
Emotional inhibition (belief that emotions are not safe things to experience or express)

Emotions
Angry (at others; at yourself)
Anxious (about what is going to happen)
Lonely (wishing that you were not alone)
Guilty (feeling that you have done something wrong)
Ashamed (worried that other are judging you negatively because of something that you have done)
Sad or depressed (feeling you have lost something or someone)
Disgusted (appalled at a situation and how others have acted or the fear of contamination)
Happy (feeling extremely excited and aroused)