

Emotional or Physical Hunger?

When I was growing up a conversation at my Italian grandmas would go something like this.....

Grandma: "Hi honey, are you hungry?"

Jaclyn: "No Grandma, I'm ok, thanks."

Grandma: "How about a little soup?"

Jaclyn: "No thanks, I am alright, my mom gave me dinner already before I walked over."

Grandma: "Ok honey, how about a little pastina?"

Jaclyn: "Grandma I am full, I am not hungry but thank you."

Grandma: "Ok honey, how about popcorn?"

Jaclyn: " Ummmm I don't really want that grandma."

Grandma: "Oh I bought sorbet at the store today, you can just have that."

Literally as I type this, I am laughing and also trying not to cry at the same time.

I know it sounds like my grandma was an annoying food pusher, but my grandma was just doing what she was programmed to do.... to take care of her family and show us "love". It is also probably where I developed some of my best qualities like persistence and resilience. LOL!

My grandma was the epitome of love. You felt love just being in her presence. She constantly was taking care of us in any and every way she knew how, it was how she found joy. OK.... Now I am officially typing and crying.

The thing about being Italian (and trust me, I know this is the same in many cultures, I just have one to reference) is food is around a lot. It's around when you need it (breakfast, lunch, dinner). It is around when you don't need it (tons of snacks, desserts).

It's there when you're celebrating, grieving, when a friend just pops over to say hi.... Yes, you read that right. You would not believe the last minute spreads my grandma could bust out on a minute's notice if people popped in. It was unbelievable, like Mary Poppins purse, but pulled out from the refrigerator. This whole charcuterie board movement has nothing on a Sicilian grandma.

Growing up like this seemed totally normal. But now I realize it was what set me on a path of emotional eating. It made it really unclear what physical "real hunger" was like and what emotional hunger was.... Because I never was really hungry.

Now don't get me wrong, I realize I am blessed that I was lucky enough to always have food on the table, and not know the pain and suffering some people and children have of not knowing when they will eat next or just eating what they have to get by. My heart goes out to those people. I cannot imagine the stress of knowing your kids need to eat, yet, you do not have much money or food to provide for them. So, this blog is in no way discrediting that. Thankfully, I just didn't grow up like that.

I think the first time I even knew real hunger was when I began to really "diet" around the age of 18. And considering the fact I was an obese teen, I probably was just eating what a person should consume in a day vs. the crazy amount of junk I had been consuming previously.

And now looking back, the first time I was conscious that I was an emotional eater was around the age of 21. I had broken up with my first serious boyfriend and instantly lost a lot of weight in just a few short weeks. Not because I was trying to, but because I was too sad to eat. This definitely became a pattern for me. Every time I experienced a huge loss, break up or life shift, I didn't eat. I thought it was because I was anxious, sad, fearful, and sometimes even angry, so I just had no "hunger". But now the more evolved version of me also realizes it also probably gave me some sense of control in uncontrollable situations.

I know you probably expect me to say that because for me being sad equals no hunger, that being happy equaled emotional hunger. But that actually wasn't the case. For me, being bored, stressed or feeling unloved is usually what will start me on that path. It took me years to recognize that. Especially the unloved part because I am surrounded by a ton of love, but there have been many times in my life that I was not showing MYSELF enough love, and that would always be the times I notice myself mindlessly eating and gaining weight.

Being an observer of my thoughts and actions was the key I needed to start to unlock the door to finding my patterns.



Growing up, I was shown love by being given food, as an adult I was trying to show myself love by giving myself food. I was being "taken care of" by being fed, even when I kept saying/knowing it wasn't what I "needed". And now when I am stressed, tired, bored and need self-care, I instantly want to snack more? Hmmmm, it's all starting to make sense huh??? I mean, it only took 30 something freaking years to figure this one out?!!!

And this is how those lines between Real hunger and Emotional hunger become blurred. I know you are thinking... well what the heck do you do now? I mean this is a lot of years of programming! Did you just stop one day? Did you get help? Is it still a problem? Well the answer is all of the above... sort of. Sometimes I find myself falling into old beliefs and programming, I mean hello we are only human.

But now I shift my perspective and mindset so much more quickly because I have the tools and support to do so.

The very first step is learning the difference between an emotional hunger and a physical "real hunger"

Real Hunger

- A need for food that develops gradually over time
- You can wait to eat, if needed
- You can stop when you're full
- Any available food will satisfy
- You do not feel guilty after finished

Emotional Hunger

- Comes on suddenly
- Craves comfort food
- Is mindless
- Does not satisfy
- Leads to blame, shame and guilt

Start growing and healing from emotional eating
with these steps:

1. Become self-aware that this is an issue
2. Identify your triggers
3. Finding alternative ways to fulfill yourself
4. Practice "Mindful" eating

Becoming Self Aware

"What am I really hungry for" ?

This is the question I finally asked myself and continue to ask myself EVERY time I feel like I want to mindlessly eat and I know I am not having real hunger. Sometimes I realize I am bored, tired, stressed, anxious, lonely, avoiding doing something etc. But, the reason I realize these things is because I ask myself this question, and I answer myself honestly.



Identify your triggers

It took me a long time to really start putting the pieces together in identifying why I was eating emotionally. It took me feeling overly stuffed after snacking and thinking "huh, why did I just over eat" ? Or finding snack after snack and taking bites of stuff thinking "yea, this isn't what I want... nothing sounds good but I just am so hungry". My biggest one would be that I was fine all day until the evening when I finally was home and trying to relax, which by the way is not easy for me, and then I would want to have after dinner snacks for no reason.

Slowly my self awareness was like pieces of a puzzle being put together. To identify my triggers, I took note of every time I wanted to eat that I was not really hungry, and I took a look at what was going on. Did I have a long day? Was I tired? Not getting along with a boyfriend? Trying to avoid getting work done? Not using proper self-care? What was triggering me? What was "eating" at me?"

Keeping a journal about this can really be helpful and totally eye opening.

Find alternative ways to fulfill yourself

This is such a HUGE part of healing. It is replacing what you think your body wants, food, and giving it what it actually needs, SELF LOVE! We numb ourselves with food as a distraction, when really we need to learn to be in the present moment! Connecting to ourselves and becoming aware of our feelings is what our mind and our body needs.

So, what kind of connection are you craving?

- Craving a social connection? Or human interaction? Call a friend, or family member.
- Feeling out of touch with yourself? Go on a walk alone.
- Not being heard or unable to express yourself? Journal.
- Exhausted, but unable to relax? Take a bubble bath or shower.
- In need of some comfort, and warmth? Make yourself some hot tea and find a cozy blanket.
- Ungrounded? Spacey, or overthinking? Meditate.
- Lost and misguided? Ask for help guidance from your higher self.
- Bored? Uninspired? Do a craft/ project.

My personal favorite things to do are: Go on a hike or a walk, clean or organize things. It sounds funny ,but clutter gives me anxiety so cleaning relaxes me... Thanks again Grandma.

Make myself tea, listen to music and read. I basically distract myself from the urge to feed my body what it doesn't really "Want" by asking myself what I really "Need".



Practice Mindful Eating

One of the best ways to avoid eating emotionally is to check in with yourself to make sure you are feeding your body fuel because you truly are having real hunger. By practicing mindful eating, you allow yourself to truly listen to your body's cues.

steps to Mindful eating

- Slow down, sit down, and think about how you feel.
- What are your wants and what do you need? Be honest with yourself.
- Turn off the TV, put down the phone or book, stay off the computer.
- Serve out your portions.
- Chew your food, and put down your utensils
- Give gratitude.

My final advice on emotional eating

Allow yourself to feel the feelings that you are trying to suppress. Realize that you are so much stronger than this. Accept these feelings and make a choice to move past them. This is challenging, deep work, but you are worth it!

I would also highly recommend seeing a therapist, coach, or confiding in a trusted friend or family member that you can be really honest with. Finding support from a non-judgmental party can be really huge in helping you heal and move on to a much happier healthy place.

Remember we are constant works in progress. Nobody has "it all" figured out all of the time. Life isn't about being perfect, it's about being present. The healing comes when you accept what is and work on it by doing the best you can each day.

Being perfect is overrated. Being self aware and being the best version of yourself is where it's at!!!!

You deserve a happy healthy life and are capable of living one!!!

XOXO,
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