How to Overcome the Emotional Eating Battle

1. **Keep a Food Diary:** Writing down what you eat, how much you ate and how you felt during and after eating encourages you to be more mindful of what you are putting into your body and why. Tracking your food also allows you to identify episodes of emotional eating and can cause you to be more accountable for your food choices. You don’t need to keep a food journal forever, but you want to do it long enough so that you gain a better understanding of your eating patterns and when you tend to reach to food for comfort.

2. **Recognize the feeling of Hunger:** When we are eating to feed our emotions it doesn’t matter whether we are hungry or not. By learning to recognize the difference between physical and emotional hunger you can start to overcome emotional eating. Before eating something, really assess your hunger by tuning into your body. Think of your stomach as a gas tank, is it full or empty? Assign your hunger a value from 1, for starving, to 10, being overfull. The goal is to eat when you feel around a 4, somewhat hungry. Avoid waiting to eat until you are starving as that may lead to a binge as well as eating when you are feeling full. You will most likely have to check in with yourself numerous times throughout the day but over time you will learn to eat when you are physically hungry and not emotionally hungry.

3. **Practice Mindfulness:** When eating, practice doing so without any distractions. Turn the TV off, put away the computer and your phone. By eliminating these distractions you allow yourself to really focus on tasting your food and listening to your body’s cues of fullness. The more aware you are when eating the less likely you are to eat to fulfill your emotions.

4. **Stop Your Negative Thoughts:** The judgments that we make about our bodies, our feelings, the things we eat and the expectations that we have about how we should look, eat and feel only leads to self-sabotage and emotional eating. When you start telling yourself negative things say them out loud or write them down so you can really be more mindful of what you are telling yourself. Then ask yourself, “Would I say these things to my best friend? To my sister? To anybody that I care about?” The answer is no, so why would you say them to yourself? You deserve just as much care, love, affection and praise as the other people in your life. By putting a stop to your negative thoughts and instead focusing on all of the amazing qualities that make you unique, you can put a stop to emotional eating.
5. **Don’t Empower Your Vices:** When you choose to eat instead of riding out the emotion you are experiencing, you end up empowering the behavior. Food becomes a coping mechanism and in turn your desire for it increases. Studies show that when you eat fat/high sugar foods the areas of your brain that manage stress are stimulated which can cause you to crave these foods even more, leading to more emotional eating. If you feel that you must eat to cope with the emotions you are having then choose fruit and vegetables.

6. **Find a Healthy Way to Cope:** Instead of eating try to find a better way to cope with your feelings. Go for a walk, call a friend or family member, listen to music, take a bath, clean, workout, etc. Do anything to take your mind off of the urgency to eat to cope with how you are feeling. Having a list of activities prepared can help you be successful when negative emotions strike.

7. **Exercise Regularly:** Exercise relieves stress and helps clear your mind, giving you a more positive outlook. Do something active everyday to help combat emotional eating. Most importantly, do something you enjoy, whether it is playing with your kids, going for a walk or taking a class. Do something that makes you feel good about yourself!

8. **Get Enough Sleep:** Research shows that when we don’t get enough sleep our food cravings can increase because our leptin levels decrease. Leptin is the hormone that helps regulate our appetite so when it decreases we are more likely to overeat. A lack of sleep can also lower our defenses and give us less resolve to fight off the urge to use food for comfort.

9. **Pick Three Healthy Foods First:** Make a commitment to eat three healthy foods (a piece of fruit, a yogurt, or a vegetable) before eating a comfort food. If you still feel the urge to eat something comforting after having those three foods then give yourself permission to do so. Usually, if you make the healthy choice first, the feeling to binge or eat unhealthy food subsides and you no longer need to eat for comfort.

10. **Know That Your Negative Emotions Will Pass:** All feelings are temporary. Whatever uncomfortable feeling you may be experiencing will pass. Instead of using food as a means to dull the feeling, try to really experience everything that is happening. Let the emotions wash over you as hard as it may be. Challenge yourself to feel the emotion instead of using food as way to escape the feelings. You will discover that you are strong enough to handle anything that comes your way and that food will never provide you with the comfort that trusting yourself will.