

Binge Eating: Emotional vs. Physical Hunger

In my “How to Stop Binge Eating” online course, a student asked me, “What does ‘hungry’ feel like and how far should we go with it?” Some people might think that is a strange question. After all, God gave us the ability to feel hungry so that we would know when the body needs nourishment. It is a natural sensation.

But what was simple for our ancestors has become complex with us; we no longer have to hunt or gather our food. Getting food is as easy as going to the grocery store or the fast food drive through. Not only that, but many also have a disordered relationship with food. They eat without regard to whether their bodies need it. Instead, they eat from boredom or to medicate painful feelings.

This disordered relationship with food is even more pronounced if a person goes on a restrictive diet. Severe diets make you preoccupied with food and when the diet ends, you end up overeating on the rebound. If this cycle continues, you end up losing touch with your body’s hunger signals.

But God wants you to live in balance; He created food good and it is a blessing to have food available to you. Praise Him for that! But realize that with abundance comes responsibility of ensuring that you are using your God-given resources to glorify Him: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any (1 Corinthians 6:12).”

If you are having difficulty deciding if you are physically hungry, then just do a stomach check-in. You see, physical hunger comes from sensations below the neck whereas emotional hunger is generated above the neck.

To check-in with your stomach, place your hands on it, close your eyes, and then rate your hunger according to the following scale:

- 5 – I have no hunger pangs at all; in fact, I am full.
- 4 – I have no hunger pangs at all; I'm not full, but I am satisfied.
- 3 – My stomach feels vaguely uneasy. I have a little food in my stomach, and I could eat something.
- 2 – I feel hunger pangs; I have no food in my stomach. I need to eat.
- 1 – I feel strong hunger pangs; I have a hunger headache and I can't think straight; I want to eat everything in sight.

Ideally, you want to eat when your hunger level is either 2 or 3. You require food, plus you'll be able to think clearly and make wise decisions as to what to eat.

Strive to retrain yourself to do a stomach check-in before you eat as I've outlined above to be sure that your body needs food at that moment. If you are hungry, then eat by all means!

But if not, then ask God to show you what is going on in your mind/heart that is driving you to eat. What feeling are you trying to escape? Confess 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

God is faithful and He will honor your desire to be a good steward over all the resources He has given you. Good stewardship includes using wisdom regarding the food He has given you the power to purchase and eat.

*Once 240 pounds and a size 22, **Kimberly Taylor** can testify of God's healing power to end binge eating. She is the creator of the new online course 'How to Stop Binge Eating' (). Charisma*

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