



Try the Feeling Awareness Process and break the bonds between feelings and eating...

FEELINGS & EATING

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The FACE Weight Loss Program • www.faceweightloss.com

There are many challenges to those of us struggling to lose weight and to keep it off. Even with the best and most up-to-date medical and nutritional information, we see that almost all dieters hit road blocks to their success. Often, especially after weight loss surgery, or at the beginning of a new diet, we can easily follow our food and exercise plan, because of the excitement and newness of it all. As time goes by, it often becomes more difficult to stick to the plan and dieters have been labeled weak-willed. We have come to realize in our 30 years of counseling in the area of weight loss and weight management that, for most people, the obstacles have nothing to do with faulty will power, but involve learning to manage the stresses and emotions that influence our choices about food.

Feelings play a complex role in determining when we eat, what we eat, why we eat, and whether we overeat. We know that we all use food in an attempt to satisfy a variety of emotional and physical needs. In our support and action tele-groups, we explore the many different reasons that people find themselves overeating when they are not hungry. Some of the reasons we eat include: to stifle or numb intense feelings, to avoid difficult issues by escaping from reality, to calm down and relax, to feel comforted and cared for, to alleviate boredom or to fill an emptiness, to procrastinate and avoid other responsibilities, to feel energized, to feel punished, and to feel rewarded. We also name some of the most intense feelings that provoke overeating such as anger, loss, hurt, fear, depression, and anxiety.

Judith came to see us having lost 45 pounds through recent diet and lifestyle changes. She had begun to feel out of control around food, and felt herself slipping, having already gained back 15 pounds and was losing the discipline that had helped her to be successful in her latest weight loss endeavor. In the discussion about feelings and eating in our action/support tele-group, she identified that she was feeling stressed taking care of her elderly mother. She realized that she would frequently come home after buying groceries and delivering them to her mother, and would run to the refrigerator and eat peanut butter on bread.

Stress has been defined as intense feelings combined with physiological reactions, and the perception that the demands we face are more than we can handle. Many people associate overeating with feeling stress and it is important to learn to identify and manage the intense feelings we are having.

Eating often masks real feelings and cannot make feelings go away. Eating only cures hunger. Relief from food is only temporary and creates additional negative feelings such as guilt, self-blame, and hopelessness. Because eating cannot truly relieve stress and uncomfortable feelings, we overeat in the hopes of finding satisfaction, which is not there. We need to develop an awareness of our feelings and learn alternative ways of coping with them. Developing this awareness is an important step.



A Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker and Diplomate in Clinical Social Work, **Joan Swerdlow-Brandt** is a pioneer in the psychology of overeating, created The FACE® Weight Loss Program in order to share with others the program that helped her successfully resolve her own struggle with weight 30 years ago. She has specialized in the field of addictions working with both eating disorders and substance abuse for over 27 years, and has made numerous television and radio appearances.



A Licensed Psychologist, **Dr. Robert Brandt** has been a national expert in working with people with food addictions since 1980. He has made numerous appearances on national radio and television speaking on the subject of eating disorders and weight management, and has trained many healthcare professionals on the subject. As a co-founder and director of The FACE® Weight Loss Program, Dr. Brandt conducts regular one-on-one and group phone consultations with people all over the world to coach them on weight loss.

Feeling Awareness Process...

1. Begin with a progressive relaxation exercise. Sit comfortably, close your eyes and take three slow, deep breaths to relax. Now clench your right fist, and tighten your forearm and bicep tighter and tighter. Notice the tension in your arm as you keep your arm tense. Now relax and let the tension dissolve away. Feel the looseness of your right arm and notice the contrast with the tension. Feel the difference between your relaxed right arm and your left arm. Now repeat this procedure with the left arm. Clench your left fist, and tense your forearm and bicep, tighter and tighter. Now relax and let the tension melt away. Now, turning the attention to your head, wrinkle your forehead as tight as you can and at the same time tense your facial muscles. Tightly close your eyes, tense your cheeks and press your lips into an "O." Now relax, let the tension melt away. Notice that your forehead, scalp, eyes, jaw, tongue and lips are all relaxed. Repeat this tensing and relaxing of muscles in your throat, neck, shoulders, stomach, buttocks, thighs, calves, ankles and feet.
2. Now that you are breathing and feeling more relaxed, it becomes more possible to accurately identify and name the feeling/emotion (e.g. sadness, hurt...) you are experiencing.
3. Locate the bodily sensations (e.g. temples ache).
4. Identify any feelings associated with this sensation (e.g. disappointment).
5. Recall past beliefs about this feeling (e.g. it's weak to be sad).
6. Say to yourself – I have the right to experience my feelings.
7. Take time to experience the feeling fully.
8. Open your eyes when you are ready.

At the FACE Weight Loss Program, we have developed the Feelings Awareness Process to break the bonds between feelings and eating. Feelings are not there to be solved but to be experienced. As you allow yourself to experience your feelings, they will have less power. Allowing yourself space to recognize your feelings shows that you can handle them. Judith participated in this exercise during our tele-group.

Try the Feeling Awareness Process the next time you feel you're about to engage in stress eating

In our discussions after the Feeling Awareness Process that took place in our tele-group, Judith had identified feeling disappointment and frustration that she was handling the lion share of caring for her mother and not getting any help from her sister who lived in the same town. She felt relieved to realize what was upsetting her. The next week she reported to the group that she had successfully used the Feelings Awareness Process when she came home from helping her mother and was able to transition without overeating.

When we take time to identify, name, and experience our feelings we create the space to manage our emotions without turning to food. The Feelings Awareness Process can be used especially at transition times, because those seem to be typical times that we turn to food, rather than identify and feel our emotions. ■