



## The impact of trauma on eating behavior and weight challenges

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### Objectives

- Understand how depression and anxiety following trauma contribute to eating behavior
- Learn how to assess for emotional eating
- Understand the importance of treating underlying mental health conditions and enhancing coping
- Understand how eating can serve as self-harm
- Understand how eating can serve as self-sabotage
- Learn how to introduce a psychology referral

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## Trauma, depression, & anxiety

- There are high rates of depression and anxiety among people who have experienced trauma (Flory & Yehuda, 2015; Qassem et al., 2001)
  - Depressive disorders are most commonly comorbid with PTSD (approximately 50%)
- Emotional eating may develop as a way to cope with depression, anxiety, stress, etc.
- Can serve as a distraction, numbing, avoidance

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## Assessing for emotional eating

- Do you find that your eating habits vary depending on your mood?
- Do you notice any patterns in your eating habits?
- Do you ever find yourself eating when not hungry?
- Do you ever find yourself eating until you're uncomfortably full?
- Do you ever feel out of control of your eating?
- Do you ever feel frustrated that you can't stick to your diet/health plans?
- Have you made many attempts (successful or unsuccessful) to lose weight?
- Do you often feel guilty or shameful after eating?

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## Physical hunger vs emotional hunger

### Physical hunger

- Builds gradually
- Is physiological, our bodies
- Occurs after we haven't eaten for a period of time
- Goes away once we've eaten
- Eating leads to feeling satisfied

### Emotional hunger

- Occurs suddenly
- Is psychological, in our minds
- Unrelated to the last time we ate
- Persists despite fullness
- Eating leads to shame, guilt

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## The 3-factor eating questionnaire

- Available in the public domain :
  - <https://www.med.umich.edu/pdf/weight-management/TFEQ-r18.pdf>
- 18 items
  - Likert scale 1 - 4
- Assesses 3 domains:
  1. Cognitive restraint
  2. Uncontrolled eating
  3. Emotional eating

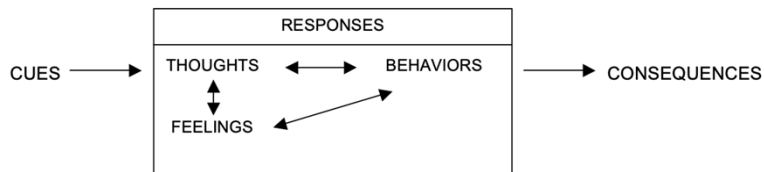
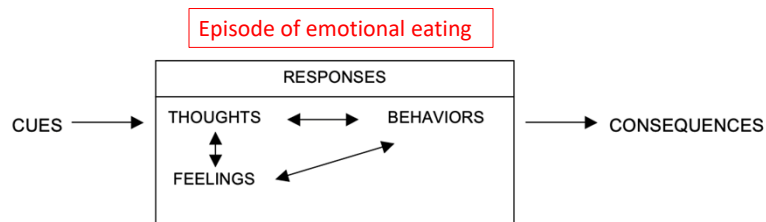
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## Why we treat the clinical disorder

- Some episodes of low mood or heightened anxiety is normal
- With clinical depression, anxiety, or trauma response disorders, episodes occur more frequently and for longer periods of time
- Each episode serves as a trigger for overeating or emotional eating
- The best strategy for reducing emotional eating is removing/avoiding cues
  - This isn't always possible

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## How the cycle plays out



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## Why teach coping skills

- Many cues are unavoidable
- Our emotions are unavoidable
- It provides an alternative option for responding to emotions
- It's how we take care of ourselves emotionally
- It promotes a sense of autonomy and control
  - With trauma, people often feel a lack of control

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## Coping skills resources

### Relaxation & Stress Reduction YouTube Videos

- This YouTube video is 10 minutes long and contains a guided progressive muscle relaxation exercise that should help people reduce stress and experience a calm, peaceful state in both mind and body. Do not listen while driving or doing anything potentially dangerous: Progressive Muscle Relaxation by Inner Health Studios <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFwCKKa--18>
- If tensing and relaxing your muscles causes pain or is not effective, you can choose from other relaxation videos by Inner Health Studios that do not require tensing. This one helps you imagine floating on a cloud. Do not listen while driving or doing anything potentially dangerous. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iRd45dirYk&list=UUZ5vqzElwPiO5aLBVgitkeQ>
- Diaphragmatic Breathing Demonstration <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB3tSaiEbNY>
- Breathing Meditation | UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFSc7Ck0Ao0>
- Meditation for Working with Difficulties | UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XlnJoYvy\\_ew](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XlnJoYvy_ew)
- Sitting Meditation with Breath Awareness: OhioHealth Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUlyNA5K--g>

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## Coping skills resources

### Free Relaxation and Mindfulness/Meditation Apps

- **Calm:** an app that is useful for nature sounds or doing a 7-day course of meditations on a specific topic. In the "More" section, "Scenes" lets you download additional free scenes/sounds. "Breathe" lets you practice deep breathing. In the "Meditate" section, try these free meditations: "7 Days of Calm." (Anything with a downward arrow and without a lock icon is free. Those with lock icons require a paid subscription.)
- **Insight Timer:** Offers 20k+ free meditations and growing. Clicked the "Guided" headphones icon and filter by length of time or try free course "Learn How to Meditate In Seven Days." You can also click search icon and look for meditations using various search terms on the following topics: Panic attack, Anxiety, Stress, Grief, Pain, Sleep, Smoking, Weight, Headache (for results, scroll down past "Courses" and look in "Interests" or "Guided" sections for available meditations)
- **Meditation Studio:** (free on iPhone only) Under "Meditations" section, look in "Collections" for numerous meditations to target: stress, sleep, anxiety, pain, happiness, performance, confidence, compassion, relationships, quick breaks, long breaks, zen, moms, kids, teens, quarterlife, veterans, first responders. Under "Meditations" section, look in "Courses" for meditation courses for: starter series, meditation essentials, uncovering happiness, changing habits. Additional meditations are available with paid subscription (those with lock icons require a paid subscription).
- **Relax Melodies:** App that allows you to customize "white noise" through use of a single or combination of multiple repetitive sounds (pleasant, nature, white noise) to aid with sleep. Can be helpful for people with history of trauma/PTSD, anxiety or panic symptoms, or insomnia. Allows you to drown out random noises or sometimes can be helpful for repetitive "racing" thoughts.
- **Smiling Mind:** A completely free app that has you identify your motivator for mindfulness practice. This app has a variety of different audio-guided exercises that range from 2 minutes in length to 10 minutes in length.

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## Coping skills resources

### Depression Worksheets

- Depression Spiral (why depression happens): [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coe/cih-visn2/Documents/Clinical/Depression\\_Specific\\_Tools/Depression\\_Spiral.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coe/cih-visn2/Documents/Clinical/Depression_Specific_Tools/Depression_Spiral.pdf)
- Monitoring Symptoms and Managing Depression: [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coe/cih-visn2/Documents/Patient\\_Education\\_Handouts/Tips\\_for\\_Recognizing\\_and\\_Managing\\_Depression\\_Version\\_3.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coe/cih-visn2/Documents/Patient_Education_Handouts/Tips_for_Recognizing_and_Managing_Depression_Version_3.pdf)
- Action Plan for Depression: [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coe/cih-visn2/Documents/Patient\\_Education\\_Handouts/Action\\_Plan\\_for\\_Depression\\_Version\\_3.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coe/cih-visn2/Documents/Patient_Education_Handouts/Action_Plan_for_Depression_Version_3.pdf)

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## Coping skills resources

### Apps for Depression

- Moving Forward (problem solving)
- <https://www.veterantraining.va.gov/apps/movingforward/index.html> (application only available through your web browser)
- "What's Up?" includes information on depression and suggestions for coping strategies, including addressing unhelpful thinking patterns - you can download this app for free or get more info at <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/whats-up-a-mental-health-app/id968251160> [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.jacksontemptra.apps.whatsup&hl=en\\_US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.jacksontemptra.apps.whatsup&hl=en_US)
- Educational Videos:
  - "Behavioral Activation" (5 min video) for depression <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBVACTJCN3M>
- Educational Articles:
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy guide <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-guide/cbt-psychoeducation/depression/none>
  - Article on CBT for depression: <https://www.apa.org/topics/overcoming-depression>
- Self-Help workbooks:
  - Centre for Clinical Interventions handouts and workbook <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Depression>
  - VA workbook for self-management of depression: [https://www.mirecc.va.gov/VISN16/docs/Living\\_With\\_Purpose.pdf](https://www.mirecc.va.gov/VISN16/docs/Living_With_Purpose.pdf)

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## Coping skills resources

### PTSD Information

- PTSD Treatment (Psychotherapy) options: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/aboutface/therapies.html>
- PTSD Treatment Decision Aid: <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/decisionaid/>
- Medications for PTSD: [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand\\_tx/meds\\_for\\_ptsd.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand_tx/meds_for_ptsd.asp)
- For a PDF summary about PTSD (symptoms, treatment options, etc.): [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/print/understandingptsd\\_booklet.pdf](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/publications/print/understandingptsd_booklet.pdf)
- Self-help resources (apps, workbooks, books) for learning about and managing symptoms of PTSD:
  - PTSD Coach app - you can download this app for free or get more info at <https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach>
  - The Resilience Workbook: Essential Skills to Recover from Stress, Trauma, and Adversity (A New Harbinger Self-Help Workbook)
  - Healing from Trauma: A Survivor's Guide to Understanding Your Symptoms and Reclaiming Your Life by Jasmin Lee Cori
  - The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk, MD

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## Self-harm

- Patients may use food/bingeing as a form of self-harm or punishment
- It is often described as:
  - A way to feel something → apathy
  - A relief or outlet from intense pain/emotion
- In addition to coping strategies, we want to help patients develop distress tolerance

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## Case example #1 – self harm

- 69-year-old white female
- Retired middle school teacher
- 3 adult children, close relationships
- Divorced
  - Hx of physical and emotional abuse
- Hx of burning 21 years ago
- Currently binge eating
  - BMI of 39.3
- Presenting concern: overeating, weight gain
  - Dx: Mild episode of major depressive disorder

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## Case example #1 – self harm

Treatment – approximately 12 months (36 visits)

1. Understanding the connection between mood and eating
2. Developing alternative strategies for coping with low mood
3. Managing the binge eating – discussing strategies for prevention

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## Self-sabotage

- Some patients may intentionally maintain a heavier weight to appear unattractive or undesirable
  - More common among patients surviving sexual assault
- Belief that body/appearance is why they were assaulted
- Illusion of control
- Therapy is important to help change their beliefs about why the assault occurred
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Cognitive Processing Therapy

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## How to suggest a psych referral

- We know the mind and body are interconnected
- The best approach involves targeting both
  - Especially for long-term maintenance
- Having the recommendation come from the physician goes a long way

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## Telehealth referrals

- Weight management specific: The Beck Institute Weight Management Workshop series
- For CBT:
  - Brightside Health
  - Rula
  - Cerebral
- Other:
  - Madison Avenue Psychological Services
  - Embark Counseling Services
  - Thriveworks
  - Centerpoint Counseling and Recovery
  - Westport Growth Center
  - Responsive Centers for Psychology & Learning
  - Enso Therapy Group, LLC

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## Case example #2

- 24-year-old white female
- Single, lives alone
- Works in Operations Capital
- Hx of sexual assault in summer of 2023
- BMI of 36.45
- Presenting concern: binge eating
  - Dx: Binge eating disorder, ADHD, GAD with panic attacks, PTSD

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## Case example #2

Treatment – approximately 4 months (13 sessions)

1. Identifying triggers
2. Identifying alternative forms of coping
3. Identifying self-sabotaging thoughts
4. Creating strategies to manage cravings and mitigate binges

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## Questions?

- Please don't hesitate to reach out:  
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## References

Qassem, T., Aly-ElGabry, D., Alzarouni, A., Abdel-Aziz, K., & Arnone, D. (2021). Psychiatric Co-Morbidities in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Detailed Findings from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey in the English Population. *The Psychiatric quarterly*, *92*(1), 321–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-020-09797-4>

Flory, J. D., & Yehuda, R. (2015). Comorbidity between post-traumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder: alternative explanations and treatment considerations. *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience*, *17*(2), 141–150. <https://doi.org/10.31887/DCNS.2015.17.2/jflory>

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