

The Eight Traits of Emotional Hunger

Emotional Hunger	Physical Hunger
1. Is sudden. One minute you're not even thinking about food, the next minute you're starving. You hunger goes from 0-60 within a short period of time.	Is gradual. Your stomach rumbles. One hour later, it growls. Physical hunger gives you steadily progressive clues that it's time to eat.
2. Is for a specific food. Your cravings are for one certain type of food, such as pasta, chocolate, or a cheeseburger. With emotional eating, you feel that you need to eat that particular food. No substitute will do!	Is open to different foods. With physical hunger, you may have food preferences, but they are flexible. You are open to alternate choices.
3. Is "above the neck." An emotionally based craving begins in the mouth and the mind. Your mouth wants to taste the pizza, chocolate, or doughnut. Your mind whirls with thoughts about your desired food.	Is based in the stomach. Physical hunger is recognizable by stomach sensations. You feel gnawing, rumbling, emptiness, and even pain in your stomach with physical hunger.
4. Is urgent. Emotional hunger urges you to eat NOW! There is a desire to instantly ease emotional pain with food.	Is patient. Physical hunger would prefer that you ate soon, but doesn't command you to eat right at that very instant.
5. Is paired with an upsetting emotion. Your boss yelled at you. Your child is in trouble at school. Your spouse is in a bad mood. Emotional hunger occurs in conjunction with an upsetting situation.	Happens out of physical need. Physical hunger occurs because it has been four or five hours since your last meal. You may experience light-headedness or low energy if overly hungry.
6. Involves automatic or absent-minded eating. Emotional eating can feel as if someone else's hand is scooping up the ice cream and putting it into your mouth ("automatic eating"). You may not notice that you've just eaten a whole bag of cookies ("absent-minded eating").	Involves deliberate choices and awareness of the eating. With physical hunger, you're aware of the food on your fork, in your mouth, and in your stomach. You consciously choose whether to eat half of your sandwich or the whole thing.
7. Does not stop eating in response to fullness. Emotional overeating stems from a desire to cover up painful feelings. The person stuffs herself to deaden her troubling emotions, and she will eat second and third helpings even though her stomach may hurt from being overly full.	Stops when full. Physical hunger stems from a desire to fuel and nourish the body. As soon as that intention is fulfilled, the person stops eating.
8. Feels guilty about eating. The paradox of emotional overeating is that the person eats to feel better, and then ends up berating herself for eating cookies, cakes, or cheeseburgers. She promises to atone ("I'll exercise, diet, skip meals, etc., tomorrow").	Realizes eating is necessary. When the intent behind eating is based in physical hunger, there's no guilt or shame. The person realizes that eating, like breathing oxygen, is a necessary behavior.

(Chart from [Constant Craving : What Your Food Cravings Mean and How to Overcome Them](#), by Doreen Virtue, Ph.D., published by Hay House, Inc., 1995)