

Top 10 Ways to Soothe Yourself Without Food

If you crave comfort and you like to eat, you've probably turned to food at some point for soothing ! In modern life the comfort and pleasure of food is part of being alive, but when food is your only real reliable source of comfort, the going can get rough. Eating to soothe yourself is what most people call stress eating or emotional eating. There's no doubt that stress and emotional eating can calm our nerves and feel good, but there's a paradox. Stress and emotional eating can also leads to things most of us don't want like, guilt, weight gain or health problems. The worst part is that it's hard to enjoy food at all and our relationship with food becomes troubled. Finding other ways to soother yourself can bring you more peace in your life and more peace in the way you relate to food !

Try experimenting with other ways to give yourself real comfort !

1. **Become More Mindful of Your Body:** Sometimes it's hard to know how to soothe ourselves when stress or emotions take us by surprise. Try a mindfulness practice that can help you get to know your body, and eventually the practice itself may calm you down. Mindfulness practices like yoga, tai chi, mindful breathing, or mindful walking can help you get to know how your react on a physical level to things like every day stress, emotionally upsetting situations, or even what it feels like to be comfortable and relaxed. Try any of these practices with "no agenda" just to pay more attention to yourself.
2. **Connect with your senses:** The next time you have a food craving become more mindful of what you are experiencing with your senses. Our senses are like a "gateway" for coming into the present moment. Ask yourself, what are 4 things that I see right now, one scent I can smell right now, what are 4 things I hear ?, 4 things I can physically feel ? Although this may take on the quality of a distraction from your craving, it's also a way of becoming more present. Keep going through the steps until you feel you can decide clearly whether you are physically hungry or feeling something else.
3. **Use your breath:** Find a teacher or class and learn some basic focused or mindful breathing skills. Just becoming aware of your breath and giving yourself permission to just breath, to just "be", will activate the calming part of your nervous system rather than feeding that part that charges you up.
4. **Create a soothing space:** Weather it's a room in your house or a comforting object or picture you can place on your desk, take charge of the places where you spend time. Create space that's visually pleasing, bring soothing music or even scent into the space and most importantly take the time as often as you can to find some peace and serenity there. Research shows you'll actually create a new pathway in your brain that can bring you to calm and comfort more readily.
5. **Soothe with Scent:** Find a scent that you are attracted to. Our sense of smell moves more directly into our experience than any other sense- in other words it's less filtered. Your body will respond to a scent before you're mind even knows what's happening, so find something that brings on calmness and comfort and keep it with you. Hand lotion, essential oils, hand sanitizer- see what you like, be open and creative !

6. **Tea for One or Two:** Enjoy a cup of tea or a cool glass of water. In a food obsessed world it's interesting how often we confuse hunger for thirst. If you're finding yourself feeling stressed or emotional, have a favorite tea or flavored water on hand. The aromatic nature of tea, the warmth or coolness of the beverage is a great opportunity to connect with your senses. Maybe it would feel good to connect with a friend too? Give yourself some space by slowing down, having something to drink. Then see if you need something else, are you hungry for food or do you need to give yourself some TLC?
7. **Connect with a Friend or Loved One:** It's great to have lots of tools and choices to soothe yourself independently, but isn't it comforting to hear the voice of someone you feel close to? Sometimes even a short conversation or the listening ear of a trusted friend or loved one can make stress or overwhelming emotions suddenly seem more "OK". Perhaps your friend can remind you of all the other ways you have to soothe yourself without turning to food.
8. **Make Friends with your Hunger:** Some people have a hard time body sensing when they are hungry. This can be from years of over-riding your hunger due to dieting, or having fear about feeling hunger, or many other reasons. Learning to be mindful of true physical hunger can be the gateway for enjoying food when you choose to eat, and knowing when all Hershey's kisses in the world won't truly ease your emotional distress. Understanding the difference between physical hunger and the kind of hunger that comes from our mind or our heart will help you find true comfort with and without food.
9. **Distract yourself !:** Mindfulness teaches us to befriend our experience and be more curious about what is happening in the moment. But consciously distracting yourself is not the same as escaping from your experience or "numbing" it out! Find ways to mindfully shift your attention from a food craving, stressful, or emotional situation to something that is more neutral. Be creative, are you an organizer, cleaner, talker, knitter, writer? Activities that require action are particularly good at shifting us out of stuck or repetitive emotional or thinking patterns. Take some time and think about some actions that you can be ready to do the next time you need to soothe.
10. **Connect with your 4 legged Friend:** Is your pet ever unhappy to see you? Probably not! Consider how soothing and comforting it is to spend time with your pet. Pet's are very empathic and tend to be unconditionally "OK" with themselves and with us. Instead of opening the fridge, spend some time stroking your pet's fur. Science tells us that this can decrease your heart rate and blood pressure. If you have time, talk to your pet or even take a walk or play. Chances are seeing how lighthearted and easily soothed your pet can be might help you feel lighter too.

What are your favorite ways to soothe without food? - please share on our blog, join our Meetup or come to our workshop 4/21/12 at Pearl Street Yoga. 4 Week Mindful Eating Workshop series also offered this spring at Root Yoga.

For more information: www.integrativelife.net or <http://www.meetup.com/Mindful-Eating-Mindful-Yoga-Denver/>

Interested in more ways to soothe ? Check out Susan Albers Fantastic book: [50 Ways to Soothe yourself without food.](#)