

Module 7 Lesson 2

Transcript

Hey, TNSers. Today, we're talking about something familiar to all of us, emotional eating. I say it is familiar to all of us because I'm sure we've all done it, do it, use it. Emotional eating is super common and this is a topic you've got to be familiar with. If you're working with clients or even if you're not working with clients. I'll lay a little groundwork here, but I'm spending most of this lesson helping you with tools for you to use with clients who struggle with emotional eating. Here's a sneak peek at what I have planned.

We'll go through a few examples of clients I've worked with, we'll talk about how to identify if a client is an emotional eater and the role of the food journal here and we'll discuss strategies for helping these clients overcome their emotional eating. So let's get started. Whether you realize it or not, emotional eating is around us all the time. You just got engaged. I'm so happy for you. Let's celebrate this happy moment with cupcakes. This movie's really suspenseful. I'm feeling really stressed out. I'll crunch on buttered popcorn and peanut M&Ms, even though I just ate dinner.

I'm so sad that my friend is moving far away. I'm going to make a grilled cheese or two or three or more. It's the end of the day, I open the door, drop my bags, the mail in my hand, the keys on the table and B line straight for the fridge for the cheese. Eat a brick of the cheese in my work clothes while I decompress from the stress of the day and start cooking dinner. Then eat a whole meal. Are any of these familiar to you? Researchers in the '60s discovered that intuitive eating, the ability to eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full gets lost for most of us before we enter kindergarten.

We're all born with the ability to eat a perfect balance of nutrients, and that doesn't mean we eat perfectly each day. But over the course of many days and months, we can perfectly regulate our intake. You know from our first TNS course, the importance of HQ, that hunger quotient. Tuning into hunger is a vital component in making healthful food choices and little kids tend to be great at this. Unfortunately, that gets socialized right out of us early in childhood when mom innocently tells you to clean your plate, or dad says, take one more bite, or your friend says, ew, you like avocado.

So most of us live with the unfortunate consequence. We override our appetites and biology. We say I'm stuffed, but there's always room for dessert or I'm not that hungry, but I'll eat to keep you company and emotions play such a huge role in overriding our ability to be intuitive eaters. One of my very favorite clients, Joanna, would do such a good job. She did an amazing job, an incredible

job with her food and hydration when she was grooving and on kind of cruise control with her health. But the smallest emotional thing, happy, sad, stressful, disappointing, or even exciting, sucked her in and she'd herself eating something she didn't feel good about.

And the trouble with Joanna was that her life was full. I guess this isn't trouble. It's a good thing. Her life was full of friends, family, school, and real life, full of emotional roller coaster stuff at all times. She would have met her goals and no time if she was an animal in a cage with a feeding time and a bedtime and no drama in her life. She liked eating healthfully and she enjoyed clean foods, but Joanna was, is so sensitive to her pleasure and pain center that she was constantly falling off track and making all kinds of excuses. I had those chips because I was working on a deadline.

It was my coworker's birthday, so I celebrated with a cupcake. Really I could go on. Her journal showed beautiful, healthy, delicious meals and some great healthy snacks, but also a few too many unplanned drinks, sweets and salty snacks that really kept her far, far away from her weight and health goals. I want to focus this lesson on the normal emotional eater. What I mean there is not the disordered eater or the depressed or anxious eater. We have other lessons that will cover that. So let's take a closer look at what we can do to help control our emotions from effecting our wellness efforts.

I found that lots and lots of people don't even know they're eating emotionally. They think that because they're not bingeing, there isn't a problem. They may not even identify that they ate the brick of cheese after work as a coping tool to decompress. Seriously. People don't realize that. We know what tired feels like. We can tell when we're grumpy, but there's a whole rainbow of feelings we may have that we don't stop to identify. So my first step in considering if you have an emotional eater on your hands is identify the feelings.

If I suspect someone may do better in following their meal plan and that stress or emotions are a trigger for them, I really emphasize the food journal. And just like I talk about the hunger quotient and identifying readiness to eat, I spend time going over a one or two word feeling that they can add to their journal at each entry. I'll give you an example of what this may look like. So a client's food journal may read 7:00 PM HQ four, chicken, too much rice, butter, broccoli, exhausted, stressed. When you have a client who brings you a journal that has mood and feeling words in it, it's so helpful in looking for patterns.

I'll say something like, wow, I noticed from this great journal that the end of the day you were really tired during the week and I can see that is where you had some portion control issues. Sometimes the light bulb goes on and then the client is ready for some intervention. Sometimes the client doesn't really think there is a connection and I point it out in more detail. Otherwise, without

the journal your client may sit down across from you, say they eat too much at dinner, aren't really sure why, and you may be left with an assumption that their hungriest at that time of day or some other wrong conclusion.

Having them identify the feelings around food is super important here. I know it sounds obvious, but I want you to think about it. You can't be mindful of what you're eating if you don't identify where you are at with your feelings. People who strive to be mindful eaters don't just focus on the food, flavors, temperature and the actual food. Mindful eaters check in with themselves and also note their feelings to help them eat successfully. Validation is the next thing I really recommend here. Most of the time we would be just as happy celebrating a raise with a cup of tea or even a walk along the river.

The ice cream isn't even necessary, usually. I always try to legitimize my client's emotions. I don't have to agree with them or even identify with them, but I try my best to validate that my client has a right to his or her emotions. When you validate an emotion, it gives you a chance to manage that emotion with an intervention that isn't food. Unless you have really savvy parents, most of us were not educated in how to cope. We have all of these emotions every day and we need some time to process and come to terms with them. If we don't, many of us learn that food works.

Had a bad day, eat a cookie. We don't just think eating a cookie makes us feel better. Science proves it. Negative emotions, stress, frustration, and being upset. Trigger the release of cortisol, which I know you know stimulates your appetite and causes us to hold on to extra weight. Guess what? Have a bite of that cookie, a lick of that ice cream or indulge and virtually any carb and serotonin is released. You get a sweet treat of calming hormones. You actually get a temporary chemical relief from being upset. Building coping into your client's wellness routines can help to prevent eating for emotional reasons.

You're going to find that coping is a super personal thing. You're trying to find out what your client can use that isn't food to manage that emotion constructively. Again, that's what makes it personal. I usually dump out a bunch of suggestions and see what they like most. My go-tos are deep breathing and meditation apps like Headspace and Breathe, a long shower possibly with lavender, a walk, listening to music, writing in a journal. Okay. So you get it and you've now identified some of these things with your client. You validated.

Now you need to take action. Once you see the patterns and emotions, you can plan for some things. If you know Friday is going to be stressful because of a deadline, you can preemptively take action by planning to set an alarm every two hours so you can take 10 deep breaths, pack your calming tea and favorite mug and plan to order your favorite lentil soup at lunch. If you don't plan

for the stress and anticipate it coming, you are so much more likely to down the extra coffee, hit the vending machine and raid the office pantry.

Planned emotional eating is one thing. Let's call it preemptive emotional eating. In other words, preemptive planning for emotional eating. Another example is that same lady who the brick of cheese walking in the door after work I mentioned earlier. You may remember my story of the stressed client who always snacked on a full dinner when she came home from work, then sat down to a full meal. We knew her snacking was a problem, but until we addressed it as her coping and decompression routine, it wasn't really going to get us anywhere.

I had her change her routine, walk in the door, pour a glass of water, go straight to the bedroom and take off her work clothing, put on comfy clothing and lie in bed for 10 minutes. Do a meditation or journal, finish the water and then go and make dinner, but do not snack while cooking. Preemptive emotional eating is absolutely something that can be managed with an action plan. What about the emotional eating that just comes in the moment? When your clients are really savvy, if following their meal plans or healthy lifestyle, they should know what, when and why they're eating what they're eating.

If something creeps in that's unplanned, have them ask themselves, why am I eating this without judgment? If they can answer that and decide they don't really like the reasoning, then they can interrupt themselves and take action with one of my suggestions from before, like going for a walk or listening to some music. Or an action plan may be a food choice like a strategically placed a cup of tea, bag of healthy popcorn or sliced raw veggies. For years, I have used the trigger and control worksheet with clients to help them strategically plan for what they're going to do when they are triggered.

We list the things that most often cause the unwanted food behavior. We then list a bunch of things that we come up with together that they can do instead of using food. Sound familiar? You'll find us in TNS level one if you don't remember. I'm full of examples today, but here's another. If your client can't enjoy a dinner out with friends because they always want to share desserts at the end of the meal and your client doesn't want to partake and also doesn't want to feel deprived or deity, put a plan in place.

Have your client plan ahead and look forward to ordering a cup of herbal tea or decaf cappuccino so she can participate in the festivity of the night, but skip the cake she doesn't want to be eating in the first place and let her friends have their fork fulls. Planning for these unexpected moments with actionable troubleshooting is key to overcoming emotional eating. I know this was a

long lesson here, but let's take one moment to review the key points. Intuitive eating gets lost for most of us before we enter kindergarten.

Emotions play such a huge role in overriding our ability to be intuitive eaters. The first step in considering if your client is an emotional eater is to identify feelings. This can be done by using a food journal and having the client jot down exactly what they were feeling when they were choosing and eating the food they were eating. Validate your client's emotions. When you validate an emotion, it gives you a chance to manage that emotion with an intervention that isn't food, build coping into your client's wellness routine to prevent eating for emotional reasons and look for patterns and identify situations where a client routinely emotionally eats and come up with an alternative plan.

This is a great opportunity to implement the triggers and control sheet from TNS level one. Thank you for staying with me for this entire lesson. I will see you in the next one.