Defeating Binge Eating
Table of Contents

Chapter 1:
What is Binge Eating Disorder? .................................................................3

Chapter 2:
Learning to Take Small Steps .................................................................4

Chapter 3:
Understanding Hunger and Food Cravings ..............................................6

Chapter 4:
Beginning the Work ..............................................................................8

Chapter 5:
Working with Hunger and Appetite .......................................................15

Chapter 6:
Working with Food and Feelings ...........................................................18

Chapter 7:
Preventing Relapse .............................................................................20

Chapter 8:
Resources ............................................................................................21
Chapter 1: 
What is Binge Eating Disorder?

Binge eating disorder is characterized by recurrent episodes of binge eating, in which an individual eats an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat in a discrete period of time, and feels a sense of lack of control over eating during the episode. The individual feels that he/she cannot stop eating or control what or how much he/she is eating.

Some indicators of impaired control include:

- Eating very rapidly
- Eating until feeling uncomfortably full
- Eating large amounts of food when not hungry
- Eating alone because of embarrassment over how much one is eating
- Feeling disgust, guilt, or depression after overeating

In contrast to bulimia nervosa, the binge eating is not associated with the regular use of compensatory behaviors, such as purging, misuse of laxatives and other medications, fasting, or excessive exercise.

Some individuals report that binge eating is triggered by negative mood states, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and boredom. For others, binge eating helps to relieve feelings of tension. Although binge eating may serve to alleviate negative mood states in the short-term, most individuals experience great distress regarding their binge eating in the long-term.

Binge eating disorder is more common than either anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa. Approximately 1%-4% of individuals in the community suffer from binge eating disorder; however, the rates of binge eating disorder in weight-control programs are much higher, ranging from 15%-50%. Females are 1.5 times more likely to have binge eating disorder than males.
Chapter 2:
Learning to Take Small Steps

People often say, “I’d do anything to stop binge eating”, and often they’ve tried a lot of things. It’s difficult to be patient, but if you take small steps, you give yourself the best chance of getting there in the end. If you take giant leaps, you just fall over.

How to plan short-term goals

A goal is something you set yourself to do over a short period of time. By keeping the time limit short, you can quickly judge your progress. If you achieve your goal, you will improve your confidence in your ability to change. If you don’t achieve your goal, perhaps it was too much to try at once and you may consider rethinking your goal. It is important to choose a time scale that is realistic. If your goal is very difficult to achieve, you may need to take one day at a time. If you are building on something already in place, a week might be more appropriate.

Your goal needs to be some small change that is realistic, achievable, and possible to maintain in the long term. For instance, if your eating is completely chaotic, a goal of eating a sandwich during your lunch break at work might be achievable, whereas a goal of eating three meals regularly every day might be too difficult. Your goal also needs to be something clear and concrete that you can measure—like eating a bowl of cereal before ten o’clock every weekday, not just “having breakfast” (without specifying how often). Otherwise, you may be unsure what counts as breakfast, or how often is often enough. Your goal does need to challenge you a little, so you know you are really moving forward when you achieve it.

It is much easier to set positive goals rather than negative ones – something to do, not something not to do. For instance, “eat at least 2 fresh fruits every day” is easier than “don’t eat cookies.”

When you’re planning your goals, think about the problems that might get in your way. That way, you can think of possible solutions to give yourself a better chance of achieving your goals.

Write down your goals as clearly and specifically as you can, so you can check your progress.
You can use this kind of chart to help:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal/Target</th>
<th>How it will be achieved</th>
<th>Problems I may encounter</th>
<th>Possible solutions to problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every working day next week, I will eat two servings of fresh fruit</td>
<td>I will buy fruit with my lunch, and I will have more when I arrive home</td>
<td>I will forget to buy it</td>
<td>I will put fruit on the shopping list. I will ask Fiona to remind me at lunch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I will forget to eat it</td>
<td>I will put a note on my pillow, so if I forget, I will eat it at bedtime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I won’t find any that I like</td>
<td>If I can’t find fresh fruit that I like, I will have unsweetened canned fruit or fruit juice instead.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review your goals at the end of the time you set. If you have achieved a goal, allow yourself to be pleased. It’s easy to slip into belittling your achievements - “Everyone else can drink a glass of orange juice without thinking about it – what’s the big deal?” But if you needed to do it, and you’ve done it, it is a big deal. You might like to give yourself little rewards – something small like a magazine or a single flower. If you want to save up for something bigger, you can even make a star chart, and stick on a star for every goal you achieve. You can save up stars for whatever you like – going to a movie or a concert, getting your hair done, visiting a friend—but make it something you can achieve in a reasonable amount of time.

If you have achieved your goal, you need to decide if you are ready for a new one. You might still feel you need a bit of practice with the same one, so your next goal would be to keep it going for another day or another week. You might be able to build on it. If you have managed to take a regular 10 minute walk, you could increase it to 15 minutes. Or maybe you are ready to move on to something different.

If you didn’t achieve your goal, think about why, and decide what to do about it. Maybe something unexpected happened which got in your way, so you need to try again. Maybe it was too difficult, and you need to make it more realistic by dividing it into smaller steps. Perhaps you should try a different goal.

Keep a record of your achievements, because it is surprisingly easy to forget, especially when you feel things are not going well. At those times, you can look through your record to remind yourself of what has changed to help keep yourself going.
Chapter 3: Understanding Hunger and Food Cravings

Hunger is powerful. Humans (like bears and wolves) have a strong biological drive to eat, because without it we couldn't have survived in the past when food was often in short supply.

It is natural for any hungry person to eat voraciously as soon as food is available. For most people in the richer countries of the world, this basic fact is forgotten, because food is so easily accessible. Most people are never really very hungry, except when they're trying to diet.

Here is a description of what happened in a famous experiment on starvation. In the Minnesota Experiment, healthy volunteers went short of food for some weeks. Here's what happened to some of them:

"Subject no. 20 stuffs himself until he is bursting at the seams…. subject no. 30 had so little control over the mechanics of "piling it in" that he simply had to stay away from food…… subject no. 26 would as soon have eaten six meals instead of three..."

This loss of control is a natural result of simple hunger. In our society, many people only ever experience hunger as a result of self-imposed dieting. Because so many people seem to be able to diet, they don't realize their discomfort and distress are normal for a hungry person. We are now beginning to recognize that excessively strict and prolonged dieting puts people at real risk of a loss of control of eating.

If you try to control your weight by strict dieting, skipping meals, or even fasting, you are bound to get very hungry. If you feel there are lots of foods that you shouldn't eat, perhaps fatty and sweet foods, you'll end up feeling deprived and miserable. Your body will react strongly to this by driving you to eat. You may find yourself eating in a way that feels out of control and chaotic, just like the Minnesota volunteers.
Recognizing hunger and fullness

If you have been eating in a chaotic way for a long time, you may find it quite difficult to know when you really are hungry. When you are trying to diet, you are using a lot of mental energy trying to overcome your natural hunger, and convince yourself that you're not really feeling it at all.

When you do eat, you may eat so fast that you're way past the time you need to stop before you even pause for breath. It may be that if you have a strong genetic tendency to gain weight easily, your body is actually not very good at letting you know when you've eaten enough.

To know that you have eaten enough, your brain needs a number of signals, that all fit together to tell the same story. The simple experience of eating and enjoying the food is satisfying, and tells your brain that you have eaten. Eating food slowly, and giving it your attention, helps give you that awareness of being full. You may find controlling your eating is easier if you don’t combine it with distractions like television or work. The feeling of fullness in your stomach is a familiar indication that you've eaten enough. As the food is absorbed into your bloodstream, the rising levels of sugar (from starch and sugar in your food) and fat in your blood all help to let your brain know you've had enough, and don't need to eat again for a while. You need to establish the rhythm of hunger and fullness that will allow you to eat in a way that is regular, stable and controlled. This may mean you need to use an eating plan to help.
Chapter 4:
Beginning the work

If you've read this far, you must at least have begun to consider doing something about your eating. Now you can decide what to tackle first. By making the first small step, you can test out how it goes, without taking any risks that are too big to handle. To decide on that first step, you will need some detailed information about the way you eat.

The first thing to do is to develop the habit of keeping a record of what's going on with your eating. This can be quite a bit of work, so take it in steps. Begin by getting some sheets of paper or a notebook, or photocopy the sheet below.
**DAILY FOOD RECORD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>What you ate or drank</th>
<th>M/S/B</th>
<th>Antecedents and Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Fill in the date each day. Each time you eat or drink, fill in the time. Then say what you ate or drank, and give some idea of how much – don’t weigh anything, but say how many slices, how many cupfuls, how many packets, how many bowlfuls … just a rough estimate. Then use the next column (M/S/B) to state whether you felt what you ate was a meal (M), snack (S), or binge (B). Don’t worry about what other people might think of it, it’s what you thought that counts. This is enough for the first few days, until you get into the habit of doing it. There may well be quite a lot you can learn just from that information, especially about how hunger might be affecting your eating behaviour.
You may be the type of person who enjoys keeping this kind of diary and gets into the swing of it without too much trouble. Or you may hate the idea. You may feel it will just make you more obsessive and preoccupied with food. You may feel embarrassed about what you have to write down. If it feels like a problem, all the more reason for doing it, because this is your way to confront those problems and get over them. It may be hard for you, but it will be worthwhile.

The people who are careful and honest about keeping this diary are the ones who do best in achieving the change they want. You need it for a lot of reasons:

- It makes you very aware of just what you are eating. This allows you to see patterns in your eating, and to identify the positive aspects that you can build up, and the difficult aspects to manage better.
- It helps you to control your eating. Simply having to write down what you eat can help you to think twice about what you're doing, and change your mind.
- It gives you a record of how you're progressing. Changing the way you eat can be a slow process, with lots of setbacks. It can be easy to lose sight of how well you're doing, so the diary allows you to look back and see.

**Some helpful hints:**

- The diary is there to help you. Nobody else needs to see it or know about it unless you want them to. It's not a spy.
- Be as honest and as accurate as you can. This means writing things down as you eat and drink, not later in the day, or later in the week, so you need to keep it with you all the time. Really.
- Try to find a shorthand way of noting what you eat and drink, so it's not too much work.
- It is a bit time-consuming, so it will be a nuisance sometimes. Start on a day when things are reasonably calm, to give yourself the best chance you can to get going.

When you’re reasonably comfortable with recording what you’re eating, you can begin to use the last column. This is how you can begin to work on the more emotional factors in your eating pattern. You’re probably aware that you eat for comfort, or to soothe stress, so you’ll need to work on finding healthier ways to help meet these needs.

**Learning the ABC**

Maybe the most useful tool you can use to change the way you eat is one you've already got - your own thoughts and beliefs.

If you're like most other people, there is a stream of thoughts going through your head at all times. Quite a lot of those thoughts are about yourself, and what you're doing at the moment. If you're doing something new, or something very important, you may be quite conscious of these thoughts. In reasonably familiar situations, the thoughts run along a bit like a train on a track, pretty much the same each time. For instance, you might check in your mind that you have your keys each time you go out, but hardly notice you've done it. These thoughts that you're not aware of are called automatic thoughts, and they can affect the way you feel, and what you do, without you really being aware of them.
We need to have these automatic thoughts to get through the day. If you're doing any kind of complicated task, like driving a car, you're thinking about what you're doing, but if you were really conscious of every thought, you'd probably be very slow to react, and be a very unsafe driver! But, although these automatic thoughts allow us to get through the day and do what we need to do, sometimes they can trip us up.

Sarah had been trying to diet all her adult life, but each one she tried seemed to collapse earlier than the last:

"I'd stick to it fine for a while then something would go wrong. Maybe I'd be offered some cake at work, and couldn't resist, or maybe I'd go for a meal at a friend's house and it wouldn't be 'diet food', and then I'd just give up altogether."

Sarah realized her automatic thought was "I've broken the diet, I've blown it completely, I've failed again." This automatic thought of failure arose out of her repeated experience of failed diets, and also from her belief about herself as a failure. Although she did well at school, and was reasonably successful in most ways, she had two older brothers who were very academically gifted, and seemed to be able to do everything well. Her parents were always pleased with them, but never so pleased with Sarah. Early in her life, she began to view herself as "the fat, dim one," so every little setback confirmed her belief that she always failed, and she would give up. She spent some time writing down the things she had achieved in her life, and the things she could do well. She began to challenge her belief that she failed at everything, and the thought that any small lapse must mean total failure. She was then free to make real progress.

Identifying the automatic thoughts

This is the beginning of real action for change. Your most important tool for this part of the process is your ABC diary of eating.

The diary is a record that you keep of everything that you eat and drink, plus the ABCs—the Antecedents, Behavior and Consequences.

Antecedents are the things that were going on before you ate, such as where you were, what you were doing, who you were with, as well as your thoughts and feelings at the time.

Behavior is the eating itself - exactly what you ate and drank. It helps to decide whether what you ate was a meal, a snack or a binge, so that you can see the pattern of your eating.

Consequences are what happened as a result of the behavior, such as whether you changed what you were doing, and how you thought and felt about what you had eaten.

You can build up the chain of events leading to an episode of uncontrolled eating:

| Antecedent | → thought/feeling | → Behavior | → Consequences (event/circumstances) |
The “Antecedents and Consequences” column is for you to write down what was going on before you ate, and what happened as a result. As you fill in your food record, think about what you might put in the “Antecedents and Consequences” column, and begin to write in that column when you feel ready. You may not want to put something in it every time you make an entry. It is hard work, and difficult at first, but as you practice, you will get better at noticing the thoughts and feelings that are going on for you, and you can begin to add them to your record.

Eventually, you will be writing down everything you eat or drink, identifying it as a meal, snack or binge, writing down the things that were going on around you, and your own thoughts and feelings. It may take you a few weeks to get to the stage of completing the whole thing all the time. You can begin to see your own A→B→C chains.
Here is a page from Phyllis's diary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>What you ate or drank</th>
<th>M/S/B</th>
<th>Antecedents and Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>2 cups of tea</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>making children's breakfasts, making packed lunches, busy, a bit irritated with the mess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>2 cups of tea, bits of toast, butter and jam, 2 Kit-Kats, 2 bags of chips, 1 tomato, half pack of cookies</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>back from school, cold, fed up with the mess, ate the remains of children's breakfast, and what I had used for their lunches, then moved on to the cookies while I cleaned up – don’t care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>whole loaf of bread and butter 3 cups of tea</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>back from the stores, cold, fed up, couldn't be bothered to make lunch, awful morning anyway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2 cups of tea bag of marshmallows</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>bought them for the children, but I'd cleaned the bedrooms, needed a reward, day’s ruined anyway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>hot chocolate cheese toasted sandwich</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>snack with Annie after school, we both got cold walking home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>2 bowls cornflakes and milk, Cheese toasted sandwich 5 cookies, few mushrooms</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>back from taking Jack to football, boys have left kitchen a mess, ate while cleaning up- they'd left the cereal out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>cod in mushroom sauce, rice, tomatoes, peas, rice pudding, apricots, water</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>dinner, full before I started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>coffee Kit-Kat</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>snack with David before bed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phyllis could see that she was often eating for lots of reasons other than her own real need to eat – feeling irritated or miserable or bored, because other people were eating, as a way of putting off tasks she didn’t enjoy, and as a reward for completing tasks. When she ate things that she felt she should not have eaten, she felt worse, and that made her eating worse. She began to see from the diary that she was getting stuck in a vicious cycle. Learning these things allowed her to set goals for change, and as you keep your diary, you can do the same.

When you have built up at least two weeks of food diary, set aside some time to have a good look at it, with a helper if you want, and to set some goals for change. You will need to look at how you managed keeping the diary, as it can be difficult and take some practice to get into the swing of it. Here are some questions to ask:
• Was it easier or more difficult to keep the record than you expected?
• What was easy? What was difficult? Why?
• Are there any gaps? Why?

The answers to these questions will give you some ideas about where the problems are in your eating habits, and so what you might need to work on. It may also help you to clarify why changing is difficult, if there are things that are uncomfortable to think about. It may be that your first goal will be to keep the record more completely, or more honestly.

You also need to look carefully at how you use food, such as the ways your eating is affected by things that happen around you, like other events in your day, and things that happen inside you, especially hunger and appetite, your rules about eating, your mood, and your response to other people and things that happen to you.
Chapter 5:
Working with hunger and appetite

Here are some questions to ask about your eating:

- **What are the good things about your eating that you want to keep and build on?**

You should take note of healthy foods you enjoy, as well as meals or snacks that you eat at regular times. It is important to recognize the good things about your eating habits so you may set yourself a goal to increase a good habit. If you eat fruit and vegetables every day, can you increase to the recommended 5 servings or more a day? If you eat a sandwich at lunch a few times a week, can you make it every day? If you enjoy an after school snack with the children, can you make sure it’s healthy food, and have it regularly every school day? It is often easier to work on positive goals like these.

- **Are you letting yourself get too hungry sometimes?**

Even if you don’t think you feel hungry, look carefully at what you eat. Do you skip meals, so that there are times when you go for long periods without food (more than 5 hours)? Do you eat enough meals (look at the M/S/B column)? Most people need to eat four or five times every day – a mixture of meals and snacks. Don’t be fooled by the 3-meals-a-day myth – most people eat more often than three times a day, and eating more often seems to improve appetite and weight control. Do you ever miss breakfast? Perhaps your first goal should be to work on eating a meal in a particular time slot each day. Try to be specific but not too rigid, say between 12 noon and 2 pm, or within an hour of getting up, not “have lunch” or “eat at 1 o’clock every day”.

Are your meals too small? A meal should provide you with approximately one-fifth to one-third of your total day’s food. If you are used to using calories, that means at least 400 calories. This is the equivalent of a bowl of cereal and milk with 2 slices of buttered toast, or an egg salad sandwich with a fruit yogurt, or a serving of spaghetti with side salad, followed by fresh fruit.

- **When are you overeating?**

You may feel that as soon as you start eating, you can’t stop, so you try to put off eating as long as you can. Other people feel reasonably controlled during the early part of the day, but collapse in the evening. Some overeat when they’re alone at home during the day. There might be particular events which make you vulnerable, such as arriving home with the groceries.

If you tend to overeat in the later part of the day, begin by making sure you are really eating enough earlier in the day. If you have a period of chaotic eating, try to split it up into a series of small snacks. You don’t have to go straight to an ideal pattern of regular meal times and snacks. If there are difficult times, like getting home at the end of the day, or after the
children have gone to bed, plan a snack for those times, so you can eat without feeling guilty or losing control.

• **Where are you overeating?**

Are there particular places that are problematic for you? Your diary might show that your overeating is always in the kitchen, or the cafeteria at work, or the movie theatre. Once you have spotted the difficult places, you can find ways to maintain control. If you buy too much food, take a list and limit the amount of money you take. If you pick at leftovers in the kitchen, put them away before you begin to eat, and eat in another room.

• **What are you overeating?**

If you find that there are particular foods that you can’t control, is it because you are trying to avoid eating them most of the time because they are “fattening”? Sweet and fatty foods are often the culprits here, and lots of people feel cravings for them. Do you have long lists in your mind of foods that are bad or forbidden? And are they the very ones that you eat when your control goes? Try to allow yourself small amounts of those difficult foods, and use them in a controlled way. First (as always) make sure you are not too hungry – the end of a meal may be a good time. To feel safe from eating too much, you may want to make sure that you only have one serving available, or that you are with someone else, or in a public place like a café. Try to make sure you have the time to enjoy the food, so you really appreciate it, and can feel satisfied. Choose something that you really like. Eat it slowly, and make the most of it.

If you feel that you *can* eat it if you really want it, you won’t feel so deprived, and you’re less likely to feel cravings. If you do get a craving, check first that you’re not hungry – would a low fat snack such as cereal and milk do? If not, can you exchange the craved food for something you would be having anyway? Decide what you really want, and get a normal amount. Take the food away from where you bought it or prepared it. If you want a second helping, you’ll have to make an effort to go and get more – is it worth it, or is the craving less now? If you feel that you can’t stop, is it really *food* that you want?

To begin with, you might like to keep some particularly difficult foods out of your way. The rest of the family can manage without chips or cookies in the cupboard all the time. You could compromise by having, say, cake on one day a week, but just enough for that time.

You can work towards difficult foods when you’re ready.

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**Andrea described herself as a “chocoholic.”** She bought chocolate every day, not just one bar, but 6 or 8. If she tried to do without it, she was preoccupied by thoughts of chocolate all the time. When she kept her diary, she realized she was trying to compensate for the chocolate by dieting strictly the rest of the time, so she was always hungry. She felt she had to avoid chocolate completely, as she was afraid of binging on it. She began eating proper meals, and found she was less troubled by cravings.
Later, she felt ready to try to learn to eat it normally. She began with a hot chocolate drink on the train, as she knew she wouldn’t binge in public. She found she felt OK, and decided to try keeping a chocolate flavour breakfast cereal at home. She mixed a little with her plain cereal, and didn’t eat the whole box. She can now buy and eat a small chocolate bar if she is out, but does not have chocolate at home. It’s much less troublesome to her, as she feels in control of it, not the other way around.

- **Does your eating pattern vary a lot from day to day?**

Many people feel they need to try to compensate for an episode of unplanned eating. This may mean that you have days when you eat more than you feel you’re allowed, followed by days of extra-strict dieting. Unfortunately, the extra restriction leads to extra hunger. If you can even out these ups and downs, you will feel physically better, and find that it is easier to control your eating. Try not to compensate for overeating. If you do eat more than you planned, go right ahead and *have the next meal anyway*. It really does help you to change from, “I’ve blown it now, I might as well give up” to “I’m going to have dinner soon, so I’d better stop.” The meal itself can bring about an end to uncontrolled eating, and get you back on track.

- **Is your eating spaced very unevenly over the day?**

Do you eat most of your day’s food in just a few hours? Many people eat very little in the daytime, and cram most of their eating into the evening. That way, it is hard to control your eating. Aim to eat half of your day’s food before the middle of the afternoon. If eating in a controlled and healthy way is difficult for you, regular eating is an important way for you to achieve the control of eating.

You may choose to set yourself the goal of eating more regularly over the day. Start by setting a goal that is concrete and achievable. If you find you go for long periods without eating, put in a small snack as a start. If your eating is a complete mess over the whole day, begin by introducing gaps when you don’t eat, maybe an hour in the middle of the morning and another hour in the middle of the afternoon. Look for the easiest changes first. It may well be that weekdays have more structure, so will be easier to work on at first than weekends.

- **Do you find it difficult to stop eating once you’ve started?**

If you come from a family of overweight people, it may be that your natural “stop signal” is not very clear, and you may need to work hard to notice it. If you have been eating chaotically for a long time, you may have lost touch with it altogether. You can probably improve it. Making sure you’re not too hungry is the vital first step. Make sure your meals really are adequate, and eat slowly. Enjoy your food. Consciously remind yourself that you have eaten enough to keep you comfortable for a few hours, and that you will have your next snack soon. Plan in advance what you will do after the meal, so you can move on to something else immediately. You may like to make your own “stop signal,” like fresh fruit at the end of the meal.
Chapter 6: Working with food and feelings

- Are you eating when you feel bad?

As you build up your diary, and complete the “Antecedents and Consequences” columns, you will begin to see if you use food as a way to cope with negative feelings. If you are trying to use food to meet some emotional need, you will never be able to eat enough, because it doesn’t work. Food only meets your need for food. If you’re going to let go of food as an emotional support, you need to find other ways to meet those needs.

Look through your diary – can you identify the emotions that trigger uncontrolled eating? Are there times that you can link your overeating to unpleasant emotions? Try to identify the feelings that were behind your loss of control - boredom, anger, irritation, frustration, loneliness, fear, or sadness. Write down some of the ABC chains.

Here are some chains that others have found:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents →</th>
<th>Thoughts /Feelings →</th>
<th>Behavior →</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Steve cancelled our evening out</td>
<td>He doesn’t really like me, nobody likes me, food’s my only friend</td>
<td>Ordered a huge pizza with ice cream, cried while I ate it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Arriving home after visiting parents for Sunday lunch</td>
<td>Really tense, feel they judge me all the time, and I’m never good enough</td>
<td>Ate everything in the kitchen when I arrived home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>Friday night, end of another week</td>
<td>I can relax and eat whatever I want</td>
<td>Went shopping to buy food, chose all my favorite things, ate it all as soon as I got home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Got home, house a mess as usual, no-one has done anything</td>
<td>I’m tired, now I have to clean up, resentment, anger</td>
<td>Went into the kitchen, ate all the cookies in the jar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these people needed to learn better ways to deal with the stresses of life. By using the diary, they got better at spotting the emotional triggers for overeating, and began to break the link between emotional distress and food. They used assertiveness and problem-solving skills to cope better.
Jane’s story – low self esteem

Jane realized that she was over-reacting to her friend canceling what had been a very informal agreement to go to the movies. Her diary showed her she often read too much into innocent remarks or minor rejections. A good word for this is awfulizing – making the worst of it. Maybe you recognize some of the thoughts that go with it:

“My boss pointed out some areas for improvement with that piece of work → he probably thinks everything I do is poor → I’m not very good at my job → I’m never any good at anything → what’s the point in trying, I’m bound to fail…”

“My boyfriend didn’t say anything about my new dress → he didn’t want to hurt my feelings, he must think I look awful in it → he probably thinks I look awful in anything, I’m so fat → he only says I look nice to spare my feelings, he can’t possibly mean it → he’s bound to leave me → what’s the point in trying …..”

You can see how generalizing from one small setback can really destroy your confidence and motivation. Jane realized that she had done that, and decided not to let it happen so much in the future.

She had begun to feel that Steve didn’t want to see her at all, and didn’t really like her. She had felt unable to ask for another date, for fear of rejection. When she decided to be more assertive, and to think about expressing her feelings more, she felt able to negotiate a compromise. She called Steve, and said she had been disappointed they’d been unable to have their evening out. She suggested another date, and was pleased when Steve agreed right away.

Eliza’s Story – a damaging habit

Eliza had got into the habit of a Friday night ritual of bingeing. She worked long hours in a competitive environment, and used food to relax and switch off. She began to think about healthier ways to unwind and look after herself. A friend had recommended aromatherapy long ago, but Eliza thought massage would be much too embarrassing, because she felt so unhappy about her body. She made it a goal to ask her friend for more information, just to consider it further. She was pleased when her friend suggested she just have a facial, and offered to go with her. Eliza saw that there were women of all shapes and sizes, and she felt reasonably comfortable. She began to relax. They made a regular Friday evening ritual of going to the leisure center for the aromatherapy rather than bingeing after work to help her relax. She also began to use aromatherapy oils in her bath at home as a way to relax whenever she needed it.

Each of these people worked on their emotional distress by setting small goals, and keeping them under review. Continue keeping the diary so you can check your progress with meeting your goals.
Chapter 7: Preventing Relapse

What to do if a slip occurs

Don't make a mountain out of a molehill. Don't damn yourself. After you have slipped, your automatic thoughts will be to “awfulize” the event and to feel you’ve ruined everything and failed completely. You may believe that if you slip once you are a total failure and will never be able to get better. You may tell yourself that changing is too hard and the discomfort of trying and failing and trying again is too much to bear.

It is important for you to try and argue against these thoughts. You can’t possibly be “back to square one.” You can’t have a relapse unless things got better in the first place, so you must have learned something or experienced some period of time when things got better. Consider the temptation to binge as a trial. You win some and you lose some. One loss does not mean that you will fail next time.

Learning from slips

Try to stand back from how you feel about your lapse and take a critical look at how it actually came about. Don't say it just happened. There is always a reason. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you allowed yourself to eat enough at mealtimes? Have you missed meals or left long gaps between them?

- Is eating still the easiest and quickest way of getting pleasure in your life? If so, you will need to change your life so that there are other ways of getting pleasure which do not lead to long-term problems.

- Was your lapse caused by stress, upset, unhappiness, anxiety or any other unpleasant feeling? If so, what other ways of dealing with these triggers do you have?

The more carefully you think about your lapse, the more it can teach you and can help you to make different plans, either to stop getting tempted or to cope differently if temptation arises. Don't just ignore a slip and rely on your willpower to change. Take active steps to change the behavior and situations that act as triggers and get others to help make these changes.

Changing an old, familiar way of behaving – even changing for the better – is difficult, uncomfortable, and a bit frightening. It takes courage and determination to keep going, to pick yourself up when you’ve fallen, to forgive and learn from your mistakes. If you do slip, you can still decide whether you are going to continue and have a complete relapse or whether you are going to stop the episode. You can stop at any point—after you decide to eat, before you get the food, when it’s in your hand. After you have begun eating, you don’t have to go on. You can stop. Anytime.
Chapter 8: Community Mental Health and Internet Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Psychological Association</td>
<td><a href="http://www.apa.org">www.apa.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Eating Disorder Information Centre</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nedic.ca">www.nedic.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy for Eating Disorders</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aedweb.org">www.aedweb.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Eating Disorders Association</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org">www.nationaleatingdisorders.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of Anorexia and Associated Disorders</td>
<td><a href="http://www.anad.org">www.anad.org</a></td>
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</tbody>
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**Note:** This handbook was developed by Dr. Stephanie Cassin, based largely on a publication entitled *Taming the Hungry Bear: Your Way to Recover from Chronic Overeating* (Trotter & Bromley, 2002).