

## De-Stress in 3 Minutes or Less

### *Stop Emotional Eating Before It Starts*

-- By Dean Anderson, Behavioral Psychology Expert

What is the single, most common problem that most dieters face when trying to lose weight? Will power? Nah. Temptation? Sometimes. Emotional eating? Bingo! That's why it takes so much more than good intentions and information about nutrition and exercise to be successful. The ability to manage difficult situations and feelings effectively—without turning to food and eating—is a necessary foundation for a successful weight loss plan and healthy lifestyle.

Fortunately, there are many proactive steps you can take to keep functioning on all your mental cylinders during tough times. These steps range widely from basic relaxation techniques to the development of a reliable support network. Other options include:

- Keeping a food journal to help you identify your emotional eating triggers
- Cultivating mental and emotional well-being through practices like meditation, mindfulness, massage, and yoga
- Developing good problem solving skills
- Turning to the Message Boards for help and support when you need it; offering help to others as a way to get your mind off your own troubles and gain a little perspective on things

But all of these things take time, and there are many instances when you need something you can do *right now*, to keep yourself grounded, focused and able to make good decisions. After all, you don't always have time to take a walk, relax in a hot bath or call a friend to talk things over. That's what we'll be talking about here—a 3-minute trick for handling stressful situations *in the moment*.

#### Minute 1: Stay Grounded

Emotional eating happens when you lose your connection to your grounded self. Stress itself is not what makes you reach for something to eat. In fact, stress is often a good thing and your grounded self knows this! We need the physical stress of exercise to keep our bodies in good shape just as we need the stress of intellectual and emotional challenges to keep our minds healthy.

Nine times out of ten, what really leads to emotional eating is getting caught in a "mind storm" of worst-case scenarios, projections, misinterpretations, and all the emotional overreactions that come with these thoughts. This "storm" turns a manageable challenge into something that makes you feel

helpless, overwhelmed, ashamed or afraid—and sends you to the kitchen to find something to stuff those extreme feelings. When you can stay grounded in the moment of stress, you have many more options.

Here are some simple ideas to keep you grounded when something (or someone) pushes your buttons and your feelings start to spiral out of control:

- **Take a few deep breaths.** (You can also count to 10, if that helps.) If the stressful situation involves someone else, take a timeout and agree to continue the discussion in a few minutes.
- **Remind yourself where you are.** Take a look around, noticing and naming the colors and shapes in the space around you.
- **Notice the physical sensations you are experiencing.** Whether it's a sinking feeling, turmoil in your stomach, tension in your hands or jaw, restricted breathing, or heat on the back of your neck, try to name the feelings that go with the sensation. Is that sinking feeling fear, or dread? Is the heat a symptom of anger?

The idea here is to stay in your body and in the moment—with what's real—instead of going inside your mind where all those unreal scenarios are just waiting to get spun out-of-control.

## **Minute 2: Reality Check**

Once you're calm enough to start thinking productively, put all those thoughts that are clamoring for attention inside your head through a quick reality check. Here are several very common thought patterns that have no place in reality. Do any of these apply to you?

- **All or nothing thinking**

*Example:* You go over your calorie limit or eat something on your “forbidden” list, and then decide to keep eating because you've already “blown it” for today. Reality: Weight loss is not a one-day event. If you stop overeating now, you'll gain less and have less to re-lose later. That's something to feel good about!

- **Reading your own thoughts into someone else's words**

*Example:* Someone made a mildly critical or unsupportive remark to you, and you feel completely devastated. Reality: The more bothered you are by such remarks, the more likely it is that you are being overly critical of yourself. When you treat yourself with respect, what others say won't matter nearly so much.

- **Either-Or thinking**

*Example:* You make a mistake or have a bad day and feel like a complete and hopeless failure.

**Reality:** No one does well all the time. Mistakes are a necessary and valuable opportunity to learn—if you don't waste them by getting down on yourself.

- **Taking care of other people's business**

*Example:* Something is going badly for someone you care about, and you feel responsible, or pressured to fix it. **Reality:** People need to learn from their own problems. You aren't doing

anyone a favor by trying to fix things just to make yourself feel better.

### **Minute 3: Putting Things in Perspective**

Most common problems that you face in everyday life are much easier to handle when you keep them in perspective and avoid making mountains out of molehills. Here are some questions you can ask yourself to make sure you aren't in the mountain-making business:

- How big a deal is this, anyway? If I knew I was going to die in a week, would this be something I would want to spend this minute of my remaining time on?
- Will any bad things happen if I postpone thinking about this until I have more time to figure things out?
- Do I have all the information I need to decide how to respond to this? Do I really know what's going on here, or am I making assumptions? Am I worrying about things that might not even happen? What do I need to check out before taking action?
- Is there anything I can do *right now* that will change or help this situation?
- Am I trying to control something I can't, like what other people think, say, or do?
- Have I really thought through this problem, and broken it down into manageable pieces I can handle one-at-a-time?

Use this approach whenever your thoughts or situations begin to feel overwhelming, and you'll quickly find that the mountains that seem impossible at first can quickly morph into what they really are—manageable hills that you DO have the ability to climb. All it takes is three little minutes of your time.