



# Emotional eating

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## 5As Team learning modules

**Emotional Eating is a common challenge** for many individuals working to maintain a healthy weight. This module reviews types of hunger drives, some of the factors that can distort hunger cues, and the role of the brain and body in influencing hunger. Recognizing there are different triggers and factors involved in hunger can help provider and patients address underlying issues that can act as a real barrier to changing eating habits.

This session's speaker is Robin Anderson, a Registered Dietitian and the Clinical Improvement Facilitator at the Edmonton Southside Primary Care Network. She has over 20 years of experience as a Registered Dietitian and has provided specialized practice working with clients to get to the root of their emotional, mindless and stress eating concerns using Emotional Brain Training and Intuitive Eating.

This module contains:

- A link to the video on emotional eating
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zW-4Md2b0EY>
- A PowerPoint presentation (page 2-25) that covers the following topics:
  - Physical hunger and its impact on the body and brain
  - Reward hunger and its impact on the body and brain
  - Stress hunger and its impact on the body and brain
  - Realigning types of hunger
  - The role of secure attachment
  - Strategies to address hunger
  - Tools to help encourage change
- A discussion guide for further reflection (page 26)
- A resource list for additional information (page 27)



# Understanding Hunger

Getting to the Root of Problem Eating

5AsT Learning Collaborative Session

Robin Anderson BSc. RD



# Session Objectives

- \* Why we eat - what drives our hunger
- \* Why hunger drives goes awry
- \* Strategies to help patients

# Why We Eat?

- \* Physical - body hunger
- \* Reward – stress, emotional & mindless eating



# Physical (Body) Hunger

## Eating is a ‘survival based’ behavior

- \* driven by your physical need for energy and nutrients.
- \* It is linked to your brain’s reward pathways (i.e. we get pleasure from eating)
- \* Ideally the system is designed for us to eat when we’re hungry & stop when we are satisfied.

# Factors that impact hunger

- \* Inactivity
- \* Depression, mood & medications
- \* Dieting, food restriction
- \* Chaotic Eating & poor meal balance
- \* Excess refined carbohydrate & fat intake (highly palatable foods)
- \* Low fibre & liquid calories
- \* Lack of sleep
- \* stress



# The Plot Thickens...

- \* But its not as simple as getting people to eat more veggies, less refined foods and appropriate portions ....
- \* Our North American diet and fixation on food impact our the hormones that regulate our appetite.

# Reward Hunger

Have you ever thought...

I want it!

It's my  
favorite!

I deserve  
it!!!

I'll have  
just  
one...





# Reward Hunger

- \* Driven by the brain's reward pathways
- \* Driven by dopamine
- \* It is 'normal' to eat for pleasure
- \* However, highly palatable foods hijack the reward centres
- \* Eating for reward can become self-reinforcing



# When Reward Hunger is Unleashed

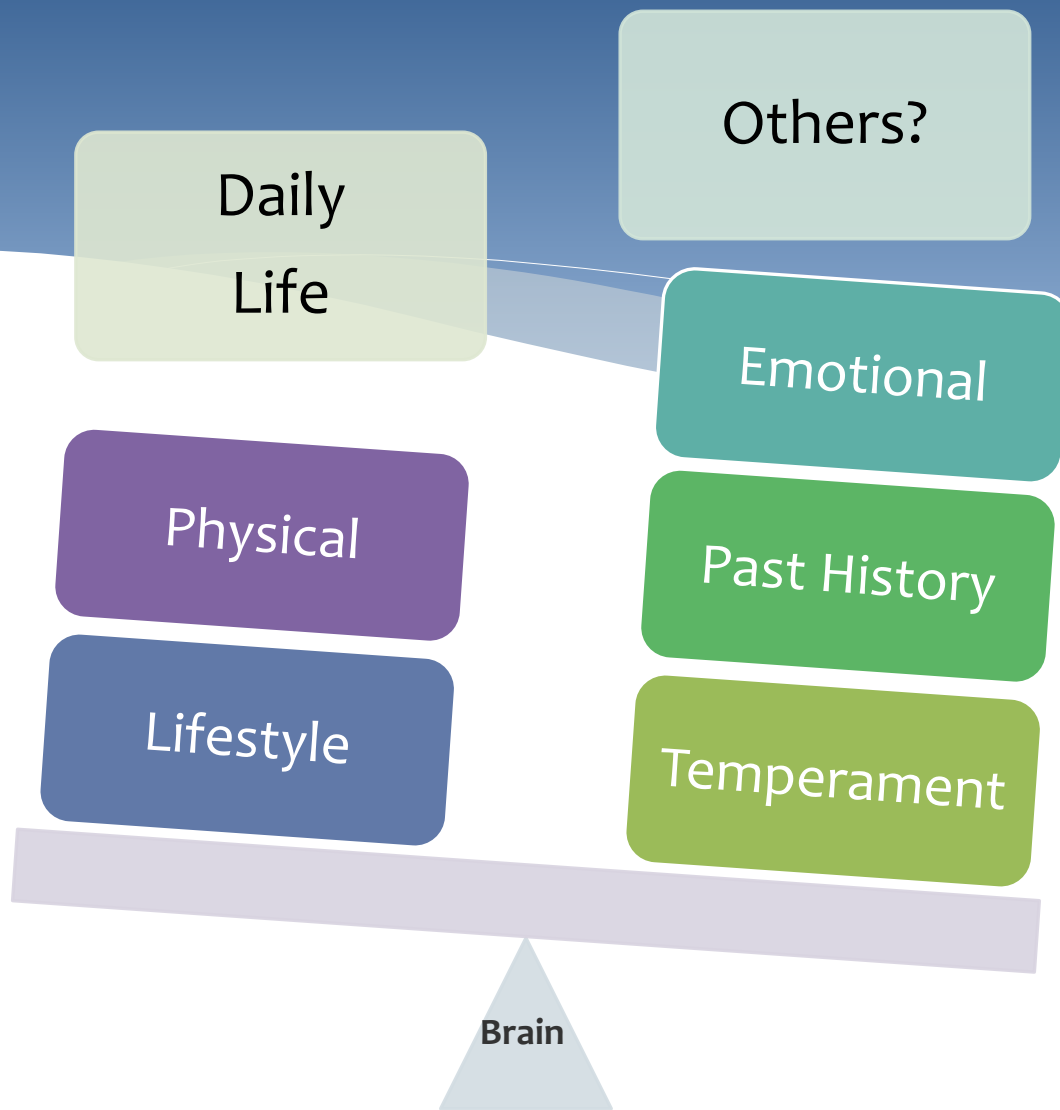
- \* Food or eating becomes ‘addictive’
- \* thinking about food increases dopamine
- \* but during eating the impact (pleasure) is blunted
- \* leading to an increased drive to eat more to get the reward activation

# Stress & Hunger

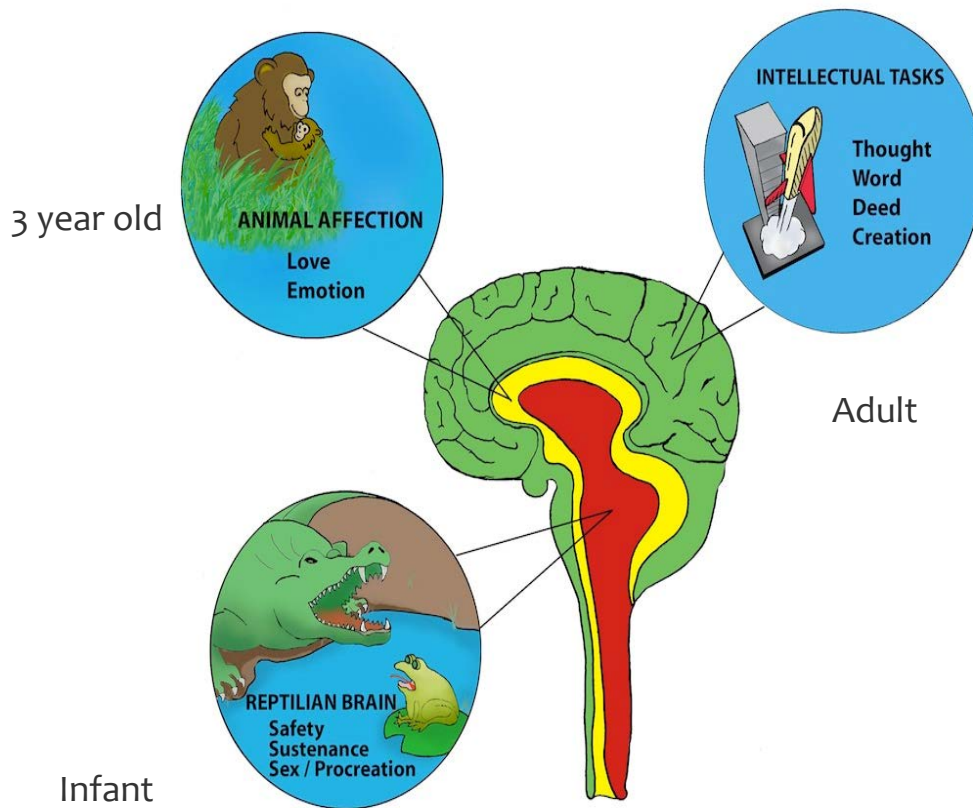




# Impact of Stress



# Stress and the Brain



When your brain is stressed your emotional and primitive brain becomes dominant.

- \* The higher the stress the more reactionary and unconscious our behaviors become.

# Impact of Stress on Hunger

- \* Without balancing affect of neocortex (hippocampus), we are at the mercy of our primitive/reactive brain to stop the stress response by using coping mechanisms (i.e. eating)
- \* Stress alters glucose and insulin metabolism
- \* Stress modifies the brain's reward pathways

# Tips for Managing Reward Hunger

- \* Recognize it's NOT always about the food. Go to the root of the eating
- \* Build your awareness of your triggers & improve your stress resiliency



# Tips for Managing Reward Hunger

- Eat to manage your body hunger
- Enjoy being active
- Take time for yourself – practice good self care
- Get adequate sleep
- Manage your health
- Create a positive attitude – laugh often
- Challenge yourself!



# Ways to Naturally Reward Your Brain

Gather 'Moments of Joy' to activate the reward pathways and activate the brain's left prefrontal cortex

- \* Connection with others
- \* Laughter
- \* Nature, beauty
- \* Music
- \* Exercise
- \* Relaxation
- \* Creativity
- \* Prayer & Meditation



# Importance of Secure Attachment

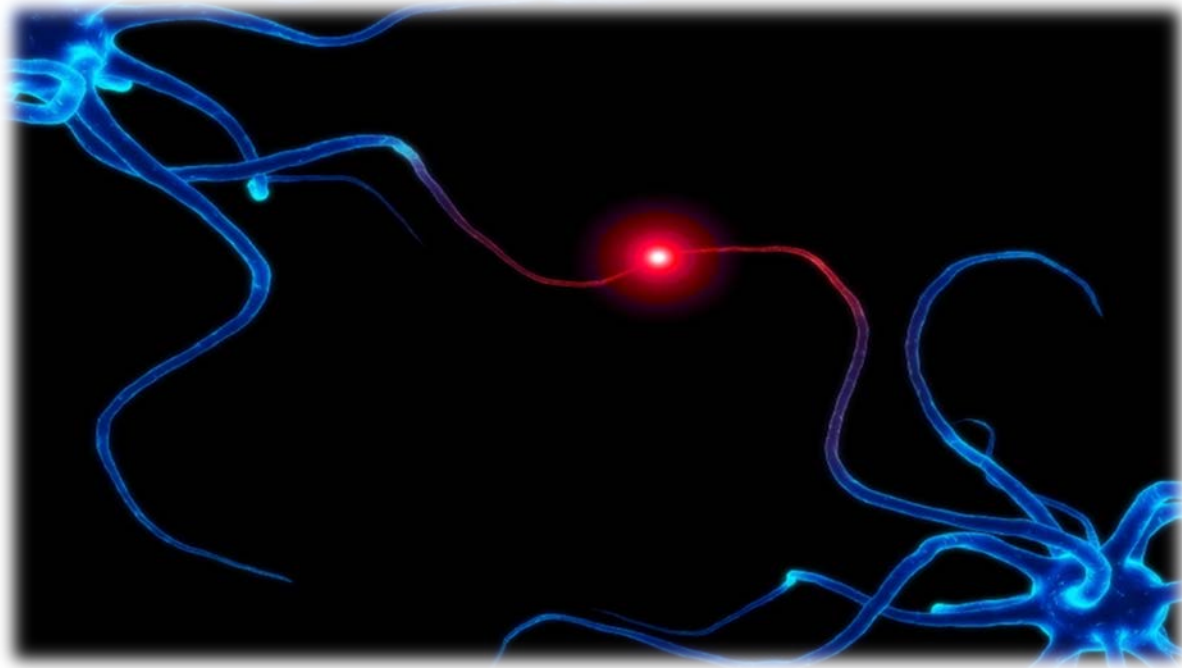
Without a secure attachment, individuals are more likely to feel overwhelmed, paralyzed, experience hyper arousal or numbness and dissociate.



# Importance of Secure Attachment

- \* Disruptions in attachment also create right hemisphere bias in the brain where brain is more focussed on negative feelings, thoughts and experiences and prone to avoidance (which can keep us stuck in negative patterns).

# The Role of Neuroplasticity





# Strategies

- \* Mindfulness training
- \* Regular, daily check ins with deep breathing
- \* Meditation, prayer, etc.
- \* Key is learning to be able to observe oneself with curiosity and compassion and without judgement and criticism (decentering).

# Tools

- \* Check ins must be frequent
- \* Develop a kind inner voice (good parent expectations)
- \* Using the power proprioception as it strengthens vagal tone and builds secure attachment
- \* Gather 'Moments of Joy' to activate the reward pathways

# Moments of Joy

Focus on activities that bring patient joy/happiness to help activate the Left Prefrontal Cortex as this stops the stress response:

- \* Connection with others
- \* Laughter
- \* Nature, beauty
- \* Music
- \* Exercise
- \* Relaxation
- \* Creativity





# Health Provider Role

Don't underestimate the impact you can have:

- \* When you listen and attune to the patient, it strengthens their secure attachment and helps them calm themselves.
- \* Set clear and responsive limits – it models effective self-parenting
- \* Help them set realistic expectations
- \* Refer to other members of the health care team!



# Resources

- \* Intuitive Eating
  - \* PCN courses (Changeways, Managing Emotions, Craving Change)
  - \* Emotional Brain Training - [www.ebt.org](http://www.ebt.org)
  - \* EATQ book by Dr. Susan Albers
  - \* Dr Sharma's Blog March 18-22, 2013
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- \* Mindful Eating
  - \* [www.tcfme.com](http://www.tcfme.com)
  - \* [www.amihungry.com](http://www.amihungry.com)

## Discussion guide

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This is a guide for questions and topics to consider after viewing Robin's video and slide show on the topic of Emotional Eating. These questions can be discussed in a group or on your own.

1. **Please take a moment on your own and consider what are the key messages you took from the speaker today** (tips, messages, tools)?
  - Of the information presented – how do you see yourself applying it in your practice?
  - Do you currently address emotional stress or mindless eating concerns with your patients?
  - What are your barriers to having discussions on these topics with your patients?
  - What resources/education supports do you feel would help you address these issues with your patients?
  - Do you know of any resources (written, websites, community programs) on this topic that would be helpful to other providers?
  - Is there anything you would like to learn more about on this topic?
  
2. **Goal Setting**
  - Take a few moments of quiet time to come up with your own goal concerning a change you feel you can implement in your practice regarding emotional eating.
  - Can you anticipate difficulties with achieving this goal?
  - Are you confident you can reach your goals?

## Resources

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### Books:

- Tribole, E. & Resch, E. 2012. *Intuitive Eating*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- May, M. 2010. *Eat What You Love Love What You Eat*. Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press.
- Mellin, L. 2010. *Wired for Joy*. Carlsbad, California: Hay House, Inc.
- Migliore, M. 1998. *The Hunger Within*. New York, Broadway Books.
- Sirota M. 2012. *Emotional Overeating: Know the Triggers, Heal Your Mind, and Never Diet Again*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger.

### Tools:

- 5As Team Intervention Tools (available through the Canadian Obesity Network):  
[http://www.obesitynetwork.ca/5As Team](http://www.obesitynetwork.ca/5As_Team):
  - Stress Eating
  - What's Driving Your Hunger

### Websites:

- Mindful Eating: <http://thecenterformindfuleating.org/>
- <http://www.eatwhatyoulovelovewhatyoueat.com/>
- Emotional Brain Training: <http://ebtgroups.com>
- Hunger Within: <http://www.thehungerwithin.com>
- Heart and Stroke:  
<http://www.heartandstroke.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=ikIQLcMWJtE&b=4016859&ct=12044291>
- <https://www.facebook.com/5AsOfObesityManagement>
- Dr. Sharma's Obesity Notes March 18-22, 2013:  
<http://www.drsharma.ca/emotional-overeating.html>  
View the links listed in this blog which provides you an opportunity to read introductory posts on Dr. Marcia Sirota's blog. Marcia Sirota is the author of *Emotional Over-eating*, a book about overcoming compulsive eating through emotional healing and the development of personal empowerment and self-acceptance. She is also a board certified psychiatrist who specializes in treatment of Trauma and Addictions.
- The Skinny on Obesity:
  - Episode 3: Hunger and Hormones – A Vicious Cycle (referred to in Robin Anderson's presentation):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo3TRbkIrow>
  - The Complete Skinny on Obesity:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moQZd1-BC0Y>