

## **Chapter Four – The Inner World of Emotional Eating**

*“Our inner guidance comes to us through our feelings  
and body wisdom first, not through intellectual  
understanding.”*

*~ Christiane Northrup, M.D.*

## **Emotional eating is not the real problem**

*"All forms of self-defeating behavior are unseen and unconscious, which is why their existence is denied."*

*~ Vernon Howard*

Diane booked a series of *Breakthrough Healing Sessions* with me.<sup>4</sup>

She worked in a high-pressure corporate environment.

Diane had come to a point in her life where she felt trapped in a desperate cycle. What she wanted most was to reconnect with her passion for life.

*"I just feel so exhausted that I'm close to giving up..."* she said. *"To be honest, I've been feeling this way for a long time now."*

Diane shared she used to have high levels of energy and enthusiasm for life.

Now she felt as if she was *"going through the motions"*.

Her home life was also challenging.

She was a mother to two young children and was the family's main breadwinner.

She held a lot of repressed anger towards her husband. She resented their shared predicament and they would often argue with each other.

Diane said it was like she was living *"someone else's life"* and she felt powerless to do anything about it.

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<sup>4</sup> Please note client names and details have been changed throughout this book.

Adding to her stress levels was the fact she hated looking at herself in the mirror.

She said all her clothes felt *“too tight”* on her and she felt *“disconnected from her body”*.

The stress of her life was causing her to live from her head whilst trying to silence her body with food.

Diane told me her comfort food of choice was chocolate ice cream.

She said it wasn't uncommon for her to eat a whole tub in front of the television over the course of an evening.

She would often say to herself *“Diane, eat the ice cream now and deal with the problem tomorrow”*.

Like many women, she found she didn't have time to devote to her personal wellbeing the following day.

### **Having the courage to move forward.**

In our initial session, I encouraged Diane to focus upon her breath.

As we sat breathing together I could feel her reconnect with her body's natural intelligence.

I shared with her that when mind and body are disconnected it is difficult to find balance and flow in life.

Once Diane was a little more relaxed, I revealed that emotional eating was a stress response.

Because of this she didn't need to try and control her emotional eating.

Instead what we needed to do was look at ways of reducing her mental, emotional and physical stress load.

*“You're right about my high stress levels...”* she said. *“It's no wonder I haven't had any luck trying to control my cravings...”*

### **How I start a Breakthrough Healing Session.**

Over the years, I have conducted *Breakthrough Healing Sessions* with hundreds of women like Diane.

At the start of a healing session, I ask clients what they would like to work on.

Most say they want to work on whatever they think their problem is.

For example a client might say they want to work on their ‘emotional eating’ or ‘weight problem’.

This is an excellent starting point.

But what I have found is that the problem my clients ‘think’ they have is usually not the ‘real problem’.

I asked Diane about the types of things she had done to try and ‘solve’ her emotional eating.

She said she had spent “*many thousands of dollars*” in an attempt to control her cravings and lose weight.

*“I’ve tried everything Katrina... Really I have... and nothing seems to work for me...”* she said.

Diane ran through all the different things she had attempted over the years.

This included buying the latest diet books, low calorie meals and exercise machines.

*“Katrina, I’ve spent so many years trying to fix my emotional eating it’s become insufferable...”* she said.

*“I don’t understand it. I’m an intelligent woman. I’m great at my job. And I’m successful in other areas of my life...”*

*“So why is it I can’t seem to stop my emotional eating?”*

When I hear questions like this, I totally get it.

I know exactly how confusing and frustrating it can be.

It took me many years to make any kind of sense out of my own emotional eating patterns.

And finally break free of the dieting cycle.

As with most things, not understanding the problem makes it hard to find the right solution.

*“Diane the reason why most diet products fail is because they focus on the symptoms of our emotional eating...”* I said. *“Rather than address the underlying root cause...”*

*“To heal I needed to move beyond thinking my emotional eating was the problem...”*

*“I had to find the courage to look inside and identify what was driving my emotional eating... By being willing to look within I was able to access deeper layers of personal truth...”*

My healing journey called me to get honest about the things I wanted. It also invited me to build awareness of the things causing me stress and emotional pain.

I started this process by paying attention to my innermost thoughts and feelings.

I also began attuning to my body and the archive of wisdom it contains. And I learnt how to take better care of it.

The root causes of our emotional eating can take time and patience to uncover. This is because they are largely unconscious.

As any gardener will tell you, if you want to remove weeds from your garden, you have to pull them out from the root.

If you only pull the stem, the weed will keep growing back bigger and stronger...

**My annual newsletter survey.**

Each year I send out a survey to my newsletter subscribers. I do this to find out about the challenges confronting women in their daily lives. Here's a sample of recent responses:

*"I'm so fed up! I can't go on like this any longer..."*

*"I feel like I really need some room to breathe..."*

*"I've tried everything, but nothing seems to work. I feel like I'm missing something... I just want to feel peaceful."*

*"I'm sick and tired of trying to be the perfect mother, wife and home maker... I feel so empty and low."*

*"I'd cry but to be honest, I just don't have time."*

*"I'm terribly exhausted. I've got nothing left to give. I feel like I'm on the verge of breakdown..."*

*"I'm either one way or the other. I'm all good and healthy or if I'm not, I'm eating really badly, not exercising and just feeling terrible."*

*"I've given up smoking (and chewing tobacco). But now I have these constant cravings for coffee, sugar and sweets all the time."*

*"I'm so worried about money. I don't have enough to pay my bills. Even if I do manage to pay them, I start worrying about how I'll pay them next month. It's a constant and never-ending worry for me."*

*"Even though I have people in my life, I still feel so alone."*

*"If I was the crying type, I'd be on the floor bawling my eyes out..."*

*"I dream of quietness, being in nature and having some time for me..."*

*"I'd love to create and do something meaningful with my life..."*

*"I want to be true to myself and feel happy. Is that too much to ask?"*

**We all have our own unique relationship to stress.**

Which survey responses do you relate to?

I am always moved by the responses I receive. They often remind me of the challenges I have had to confront and work through in my life.

They also highlight the unprecedented levels of stress women are under today.

Have you ever felt pressure to be the perfect daughter, girlfriend, lover, or spouse? I know I have at different times in my life.

Society imposes all kinds of expectations and burdens upon women. It is important to build awareness of the stress placed upon us from the outside world.

We also need to be aware of the stress we create within ourselves.

We all have our own unique way of dealing with stress. As well as individual stress tolerance levels too.

What is stressful for one woman may not be stressful to another.

There is no need to compare your ability to cope with stress to anyone else.

Some women thrive on a lot of stress, whereas others may only be able to contend with small amounts.

Emotional eating is a signal you are reaching a limit of how much stress you can deal with in the moment.

It's important to observe the things that cause you stress.

You can release stress by experimenting with different healing tools.

When you release stress, anxiety and overwhelm, you create space for something new.

### **Is all stress bad?**

One thing I like to share with my clients is that there are two types of stress: ‘*good stress*’ and ‘*bad stress*’.

My focus with clients is to help them optimise the positive effects of good stress. And minimise the negative effects of bad stress.

So what exactly is good stress?

**Good stress** gives you energy, vitality and flow in your life. It supports you to act in alignment with your highest values and aspirations, as well as your dreams. It also helps you to live a life you love and achieve the things most important to you.

Good stress is healthy for your body, mind and spirit. It plays an important role in helping you to realise your true potential.

It can help you strive for deadlines. Like working to finish an important project or making a special effort for a social function.

Once the deadline or event has passed, our lives return to normal and our stress levels rebalance.

**Bad stress** robs you of your energy, rhythm and natural flow. It can create chronic anxiety and overwhelm that’s hard to recover from. It can also create a sense there is no way out of a situation.

Bad stress can create forms of self-sabotaging behaviour such as resistance and procrastination. It can also result in the need to use a coping strategy like emotional eating.

Bad stress tends to build up gradually making it hard to detect. If left unaddressed, it can lead to adverse consequences. Such as a physical breakdown as was the case for me.

*\* Please note: When I am discussing the stress that causes emotional eating throughout the book, I am referring to ‘bad stress’.*

## **Emotional eating is a coping strategy**

*“Nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know.”*

~ *Pema Chödrön*

In *Losing Weight is a Healing Journey* I defined emotional eating as

*“a scenario where food is used to manage, regulate and even medicate uncomfortable feelings on a regular or habitual basis”.*

Or in other words, emotional eating is a ‘coping strategy’.

A coping strategy enables a person to carry on attending to their everyday demands. This is without having to address deeper life issues or concerns. These concerns can include unhealed experiences of the past or fear and anxiety about the future.

Emotional eating is not an attempt to resolve stressful thoughts and feelings. But rather, a way to soothe, pacify and placate them.

The trouble with coping strategies is they don’t address the real problem. As a result, they can never provide a permanent solution.

A coping strategy can yield temporary relief and distraction from the pain, hurt and stress you may be experiencing in your life. Thus helping you to feel better in the moment.

Once the temporal effects have worn off, you will end up feeling worse.

This is because the underlying cause of stress and overwhelm remains unaddressed and unresolved.

Although emotional eating is a common coping strategy for many women, it is by no means the only one.

Other coping strategies include excessive shopping, exercise, television, sex, smoking, alcohol, drugs, work, gossip and even drama.

### **Does using a coping strategy make you a bad person?**

Despite what the dieting industry would have you believe, you are not a bad person for using emotional eating to deal with stress.

Coping strategies are nothing to be ashamed of. They don't mean you are weak willed or lacking in self-discipline. It took me a while to work this out for myself.

I want you to know there is a time and place for coping strategies.

Life is messy. And coping strategies can provide women with temporary emotional and psychological benefits. Particularly when they are unable to resolve stressful circumstances in the moment. I was an emotional eater for nearly a decade. And for a while it did help to make me feel better.

Where coping strategies turn problematic is when they become our default approach to life. Or in other words, when a 'short-term solution' turns into a 'long-term strategy'.

If the underlying emotional stress is left unaddressed, it can have downstream consequences.

Emotional eating can affect your physical wellbeing. It can cause bloating, weight gain, sleep issues and other imbalances.

Emotional eating can also affect the quality of your inner wellbeing.

It can create feelings of guilt, self-attack and the desire for self-punishment. These stressful feelings can create the conditions for further food bingeing episodes. Emotional eating can morph into a vicious cycle that strengthens and reinforces itself.

With the benefit of hindsight I was able to see my emotional eating had very little to do with food.

My downfall was I didn't have the awareness or healing tools to deal with my stress in a more empowering way.

When I knew better, I was able to transform my life for the better.

**Everyone is fighting some kind of battle.**

I have run *Breakthrough Healing Sessions* with people from all walks of life. This includes many successful celebrity and high net worth clients.

I have come to see first hand that each of us is fighting some kind of battle.

If your life is feeling difficult at the moment, you are not alone.

We all have unique challenges to confront and work through in this lifetime.

People who experience success in one area of life can often face big challenges in others.

One thing that has become clear to me from doing my healing work is that we are all doing the best we can.

This is especially true when you take into account someone's individual nature, awareness levels and life story.

Now life wouldn't be much fun if we were only given challenges without a way of resolving them right?

Each of us have been given special talents to triumph over our tribulations.

These natural talents and abilities await your recognition, cultivation and development.

The trouble for most is we remain asleep to the power we have residing dormant within us.

Your emotional eating is a way for you to discover your innate gifts and natural talents.

You can use these abilities to rise above your challenges and become the very best person you can be.

**The profit motive of the dieting industry.**

The dieting industry would like to distract you from the inner power residing within you.

It does this by convincing women to give their attention to the latest dieting trends and fads.

And this is despite the fact the dieting model has an accepted failure rate of 95%.

The dieting industry wants you to believe you have to control your emotional eating. They encourage you to focus on calorie counting, portion control and food restriction.

I spent a good deal of my teenage years trying to solve my ‘weight problem’ using these methodologies.

Each time a new diet would appear I would become hopeful about the prospect of my life changing for the better.

Of course my end results were always disappointing.

As I attempted each new diet, it wouldn’t take long for my emotional eating to flare up.

Dieting would trigger uncomfortable feelings inside me. Without providing any healing tools to address and release them.

I had no idea how to use these feelings to transform my life. Instead I sought relief from my feelings through my favourite comfort foods.

Trying to control my emotional eating through dieting had the opposite effect to what I intended.

Not only did I gain far more weight than I ever lost, it also stripped me of my courage, confidence and self-esteem.

By the time my body broke down, I’d almost given up on the idea of ever being able to lose weight. Or reign in my emotional eating.

**I thought there was something wrong with me.**

My dieting failures convinced me there must be something wrong with me.

This led me to go on a relentless search to find out why I was so ‘bad’ at dieting.

After enduring years of shame, I discovered my dieting story was a similar story shared by many women.

The sad reality is most women fail at dieting and gain more weight than they lose.

Perhaps this has been true in your experience too?

The thing I began to recognise is the reason why diets fail is because they have been ‘designed to fail’.

The dieting industry has no interest in helping you understand your inner most thoughts and feelings.

It ignores the root cause of emotional eating and as a consequence the miraculous nature of the solution.

It has no incentive in liberating its customer base from their weight concerns. And it certainly doesn’t want you to *Heal Emotional Eating For Good*.

The last thing this multi-billion dollar industry wants to do is put itself out of business.

What they are interested in is getting women to buy into the ‘dieting model’ so they can profit from us forever.

The dieting industry is well aware the money is in keeping women sick, tired and overweight. It’s not in helping them to become healthy, happy and free.

And once they’ve got you hooked, they have endless things to sell you to keep you distracted from the truth.

You could waste lifetimes wading through their packaged meals, diet soft drinks and exercise machines. And still be no further along in your journey.

Glossy women's magazines and other forms of mainstream media add to the confusion.

They publish contradictory dieting information to keep women feeling disorientated, frustrated and stuck.

They generate massive advertising revenues from spreading lies and deception. They design ad campaigns to keep women in a perpetual state of guilt and shame around their bodies.

They make you feel as if the only way you can change your life is by consuming the products they advertise.

They sell the idea that happiness is 'an outside job'. All you need is the right clothes, shoes, make up, hairstyle, perfume, jewelry, car, house and lover. And then your life will be amazing.

The truth is that true fulfillment has and always will be 'an inside job'.

It is your inner world that creates your experience of the outer world and not the other way around.

If you want to heal, you must see this haze of misinformation and confusion for what it is.

You are a magnificent creation.

You do not have to believe anyone that tries to convince you otherwise.

Take back your power from the institutions that profit from your struggle.

You can then reinvest that energy into healing yourself and pursuing your dreams.

And when you do, your life will transform forever...

## **Emotional eating has costs and pay-offs**

*“Eating crappy food isn't a reward - it's a punishment.”*

~ *Drew Carey*

Many women book *Breakthrough Healing Sessions* with me when their ‘coping strategies’ stop working.

Or when the cost of their emotional eating strategy starts to outweigh the pay-offs.

The **cost** of a coping strategy is the pain, suffering and lost opportunities it creates in your life. Although the costs start out low, they tend to accumulate over time.

The **pay-off** of a coping strategy is the benefit it gives you. The pay-off may feel significant in the beginning but the effects tend to lesson over time.

The reason we use coping strategies is because the perceived pay-offs outweigh the perceived costs.

When a coping strategy adds more pain than it relieves, transformation becomes possible.

Most emotional eaters are unaware of the costs and pay-offs of their coping strategy.

In my case, it took a big shock for me to start paying closer attention.

You do not need to hit rock bottom in order to heal.

You can begin to reduce the stress driving your emotional eating right now.

A great way to start is by building your awareness of the hidden costs and pay-offs that underpin your emotional eating...

**The costs and pay-offs of my emotional eating.**

When I started on the path of emotional eating as a young teenager I was in a pretty healthy place. I was able to manage my emotions with food without any serious physical consequences.

At this innocent starting point, the ‘pay-offs’ of my emotional eating were high and the ‘costs’ were low.

They were the perfect conditions for my food addiction to form and develop unnoticed.

With the passing of time, my body began to show signs of moving out of balance and I started gaining weight.

Soon the kids at school started making fun of me behind my back.

Even my well-meaning grandfather, pulled me aside one day to tell me I was getting “*chubby*”.

It wasn’t long before I became a young woman who was shy, self-conscious and ashamed of her body.

As my teenage years progressed, I started to turn to food whenever I was feeling sad or lonely.

The good feelings I received from my emotional eating outweighed the costs. So I saw no compelling reason to do anything different.

After the incident with Jake, my emotional eating became the glue that held my life together. And then one day it stopped working.

When my body broke down it was clear I could no longer walk the path I was on. Being bed ridden for months and being spoon-fed by my mother, was all the proof I needed to confirm this.

The costs of my emotional eating had finally exceeded the pay-offs.

The time had come for me to find the courage to move in a new direction or risk even more dire health consequences.

**My cost and pay-off analysis.**

Before I could start changing my life, I needed to have a deeper understanding of my emotional eating.

I had been studying about the concept of costs and pay-offs in my marketing degree. I decided to see if I could apply the same approach to assess my emotional eating...

While I was in my sick bed, I took out a notebook and began to journal the costs and pay-offs of my predicament.

Some of the costs I experienced from emotional eating included:

- Loss of self confidence, self esteem and self worth
- Increased feelings of lethargy and depression
- Weight gain of over 60 pounds
- Chronic fatigue and adrenal exhaustion
- Self attack after emotional eating episodes
- Not feeling good enough
- Feeling sick and tired
- Lack of energy to do the things I wanted to do
- A lack of depth and intimacy in my friendships

Some of the pay-offs I experienced from emotional eating included:

- The gratification that came from eating whatever I wanted
- Not having to change my behaviour or do something different
- Not having to deal with my true feelings
- Not having to take responsibility for my thoughts and beliefs
- Not having to risk sharing my pain with other people
- Not having to get honest with myself
- Not having to take responsibility for my health
- Not having to listen and attune to my body's needs
- Being able to soothe my uncomfortable feelings with food
- Feeling as if the rules didn't apply to me
- Confirmation of my belief I wasn't good enough

**Helping Diane get clear on her costs and pay-offs.**

I shared what I had learnt about costs and pay-offs with Diane.

I have found most clients are aware of the costs of their emotional eating. But are unaware of the pay-offs.

Diane and I worked through the exercise together. I asked her to close her eyes to see if she could connect with the costs of her emotional eating strategy.

Diane reeled off the following costs...

- She felt out of control and ashamed of herself
- Her emotional eating was draining her life force energy
- It was making her body feel fat and bloated
- It was making her feel hopeless and unhappy with her life
- It was expensive to feed her addictions
- She felt like she wasn't being a good example to her children
- She was sabotaging her happiness at home and at work
- She felt depleted and unsure of what to do about it

Diane found the second part of the exercise a little more difficult. She had to challenge herself to find her emotional eating pay-offs.

Here are the payoffs that she shared...

- She didn't have to take responsibility for her health
- She didn't have to address her work related stress
- She didn't have to address her relationship with herself
- She was able to blame her husband for their situation
- She was able to indulge herself whenever she liked
- She didn't have to make any changes in her life
- She had the feeling she was getting what she deserved
- She had a reason to feel angry all the time
- Emotional eating helped her switch off and forget about her pain
- She was able to criticise herself like her parents did



**Chapter summary.**

Emotional eating is not the real problem. This is why it cannot be resolved through willpower or by trying to control your food intake.

Emotional eating is a call for you to look inwards and start paying attention to your life. It is a call to follow your dreams and be true to yourself.

Healing happens when you listen to your cravings and allow them to give you feedback about your life. Give yourself permission to feel your feelings, rather than feed them.

Instead of using food to soothe and comfort, ask yourself questions like:

- What am I truly hungry for?
- What am I really craving?
- What am I ready to do differently?

With time you will recognise the stressful thoughts and feelings at the root of your emotional eating.

Instead of using fake food as a coping strategy, you can choose to use healing tools instead.

Emotional eating has both costs and pay-offs.

When the pay-offs are more than the costs your emotional eating will continue.

When the costs of emotional eating outweigh the pay-offs, it becomes possible to *Heal Emotional Eating For Good*.

Your emotional eating is a gift and it is here to teach you something important.

Look upon it as a place you are passing through on your healing journey and not as your final destination.