

Alternative Actions Can Help You Cope with Problematic Habits around Eating

Objective

Identifying alternative actions to reduce problematic habits around eating.

You Should Know

If you have an eating disorder, by definition you have one or more unhealthy habits including bingeing, purging, restricting food intake, and overexercising. Over time, these behaviors may have become an unhealthy cycle you feel you cannot break. Giving in to your urge reinforces your belief that your unhealthy habits are the only way you can feel better. You may feel you have no control at all regarding your unhealthy eating habits or the daily lifestyle choices you make to support these habits.

But, in fact, you can control your urges. Most people who overcome eating disorders say when they learn to control their urges, even for a short period of time, their urges gradually subside. They eventually come to understand that the emotional distress which triggers their urges will also subside on its own.

This worksheet is designed to help you delay your urges to engage in unhealthy habits around eating by substituting alternative healthy behaviors.

You can begin by developing a list of alternative behaviors to use when you feel an urge to practice an unhealthy habit. Here are a few alternative actions that could distract and/or soothe you when you feel an urge to do something you know is unhealthy:

- Calling a friend, mentor, or family member.
- Listening to a guided meditation, music, or practicing yoga.
- Taking a bath or shower.
- Painting your nails.
- Knitting, crocheting, beadwork, painting, or engaging in other craft activities.
- Playing a computer game
- Going for a walk or playing with a pet.

Make a list of additional alternative actions:

When you use the worksheet on the next page to record your behavior, remember that every time you delay your urge, you are increasingly able to tolerate distress. Over time, resisting urges and coping with uncomfortable feelings will become easier, and eventually you will form healthier habits.

Exploring Delay and Alternative Actions

Directions: Keep a record of alternative actions you use to delay your urges. Use this log to make connections between your uncomfortable feelings and behaviors.

Trigger: <i>Emotional, physical, or situational?</i>	Describe What Happened:	Emotions: <i>How did I feel?</i>	Short-Term Solution: <i>What do I want to do now to make myself feel better?</i>	Long-Term Consequence: <i>How will that make me feel later?</i>	Other Behaviors: <i>What else can I do to make myself feel better?</i>

Think About It

What did you learn about your habits around eating during this exercise?

Were there some answers that surprised you?

Describe your top three alternative activities.

What are other ways that you can delay unhealthy compensatory behaviors?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(**1** = not very helpful, **5** = moderately helpful, **10** = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
