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Things To Do Instead of Bingeing: Creating Your Own "Self-Care Menu"

It is often hard to image what to do instead of bingeing, especially when one is in the throws of a strong urge to emotionally eat. It is imperative to have a collection of self-care activities that can be used to counter the impulse to binge. As with physical hunger, one type of food will not satisfy you all the time. Likewise, it is important to have a menu of various options of self-care. One solution will not work in all situations. As you continue on your path of recovery, you will find that you become more adept at being able to identify what you truly need to soothe yourself in a given situation.

Below are some suggestions for 'things to do' that can help. There are three lists, each with a different purpose. When you are tempted to binge, pick one option from the 'Immediate' list below, and do it! Use the 'Short-term' list afterwards for planning how not to binge in the future, and the 'Long-term' list for more expansive lifestyle changes. Personalize these lists by adding your own ideas. As you establish more recovery time, you will learn more and varied ways to take care of yourself.

Make a copy of your 'Immediate' list and keep it in an easily accessible place, perhaps on your refrigerator and/or in your wallet. When you are tempted to binge, select an item from this list instead.

View the lists below as starting points, suggestions of things that may help you sooth yourself. Revise the lists so they reflect solutions that work personally for you.

'Immediate Things To Do Instead of Bingeing'

- Postpone the binge for ten minutes. Set a timer. This should help create a gap between the impulse and the action, allowing you to pick another option from your list. Some find it helpful to journal during this waiting period, to access whatever underlying emotions are prompting the binge, and/or to identify what they truly need in that moment.
- Brush your teeth, take a shower or bath.
- Soak binge food in water.
- Leave the environment that's tempting you to binge. Go to a park, library, or other 'safe' place.

- Call a supportive friend either just to talk or to address your problem. Cultivate more friends who are sensitive, compassionate, and capable of being with you when you are in a hard place. Someone who has overcome an eating disorder may be especially understanding.
- In panic situations, relax with deep breathing. Take deep breaths for the count of ten, hold it for that long, and exhale. Repeat this a few times.
- Get your mind on something else. Chew gum. Listen to music or watch television. Distract yourself from the impulse long enough to settle down.
- Let out your emotions in an aggressive way. Punch or scream into a pillow. Beat your bed with a tennis racket or baseball bat. Loud crying can be a great release.
- Take part in physical activity. Go for a walk, jog, swim or bike ride. Hit golf balls or play tennis.
- Stop yourself and identify the real hunger. Where is it coming from? Your throat? Your stomach? Your heart? Write down your most spontaneous answers. These identify the source of your true wants and needs.
- Write in your journal or tape record your thoughts. Be intimate and honest. Look back at earlier entries to discover patterns and see progress. Address questions like, "What is the payoff to this binge?"
- List the foods you are fantasizing about, seal the paper in an envelope and throw it away, or flush it down the toilet.
- Create and use panic cards with step-by-step instructions on what to do in difficult situations. Each card would include one strategy. For example: "Work in the garden: 1. Go to the nursery and buy seeds, starter plants or soil amendments. 2. Return home and do planting. 3. Offer your gratitude and blessings to the garden. 4. Show your work to a friend or neighbor." Come up with a deck of panic cards of your own.
- If you can, stop yourself in the middle of a binge. This may seem impossible, but those who have done it say it is a very powerful accomplishment. Try to breathe peace into your uncomfortably full body. Do whatever it takes to stop you from eating more. Afterwards, process your feelings in your journal or with a support person.

'Short-term Planning For Not Bingeing'

- Make your own list of 'Immediate' things you can do instead of bingeing. As you discover which activities are successful, repeat them and add similar options.
- Incorporate relaxation techniques into your daily routine. Take a yoga class, meditate for 20 minutes every day, or simply take 'Quiet Time' to be away from others and alone with your thoughts.
- Investigate your childhood. Everyone has deep issues related to their family and the environment in which they were raised. Our relationships with friends

and teachers, the way we viewed media and culture, and so much more are also part of who we are today. Look through photo albums and memorabilia, ask questions of your parents, share notes with friends and siblings, and devote time to reflect. Uncover any causes that you can for your binge eating.

- Write a letter to a family member about your bingeing; however, *you do not have to send the letter*. Have the courage to say who you are and what you need. Write a series of letters to that person over an extended period of time. Be honest, assertive, and candid.
- Call or visit 'long lost' childhood friends whom you have thought about over the years but haven't seen in a while. Track them down. Catch up on each other's lives.
- For one day, eat in a way that is attuned to your physical hunger and satiation. Could you get used to eating this way?
- Plan ahead and attend a cultural event, such as a concert, play, art exhibit, etc. Prior to going, study up on the subject. These types of personally enriching activities can take the place of bingeing.
- Make lists about your life: likes and dislikes, goals, priorities, accomplishments, things-to-do, people to call, etc. Lists are good for organizing your thoughts instead of letting them overwhelm you.
- Practice saying 'No.' Be assertive and express your needs, small or large. Set your own limits and boundaries. This may feel risky at first, but it gets easier as you get stronger.
- Take a vacation. Get away from your usual routine, and decide to not binge while away. Be a 'new' you while you are gone, and think about ways to continue with that attitude when you return. You may discover it worthwhile to make changes to your regular environment.
- Try visual imagery, which can help you to later act out a situation in a positive way. Picture yourself doing something before you do it. These scenarios might involve food/meals and/or interactions with people.
- Begin to smile at others. Consider hugging! Remember that most people are a bit shy themselves. Something as small as a nod of the head connects you to others in wonderful ways.

'Long-term Things To Do To Stop Bingeing'

- Get involved in volunteering. By giving freely, your own inherent goodness will radiate back to you.
- Practice love by taking care of pets. A dog or cat will provide unconditional acceptance, affections, and companionship. Staring at fish can be relaxing.
- Learn something new: a foreign language, CPR, a musical instrument, an art medium or craft, mechanics or electronics, or computer programs. Try out classes that emphasize self-reliance, assertiveness, or improved body image.

- Read! Go to the library or local bookstore. Always have a book handy to read for pleasure.
- Use positive language. Find some affirmations that resonate for you and say them often.
- Begin to record your dreams. Watch for patterns and subtle meanings. If it interests you, get a book on dream analysis.
- Experiment with your own interests!

Adapted from Bulimia: A Guide to Recovery by Lindsey Hall & Leigh Cohn