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Dedicated to all the teens who think that overeating is their only means of comfort and sweetness. May you find help, hope, and healing.

And to these authors, whose work has had a profound impact on the health field: Aaron T. Beck, pioneer of cognitive behavioral therapy; Jon Kabat-Zinn, creator of mindfulness-based stress reduction; and Evelyn Tribble and Elyse Resch, authors of *Intuitive Eating*.

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Introduction: Building a Stable Table

This workbook is divided into four sections: Section 1 is about feelings. Section 2 is about thoughts. Section 3 is about taking care of your body. Section 4 will teach you lots of ways to fill up (that don't leave you feeling bloated and ashamed). Just as a table needs all four legs to stay stable, learning and practicing all four sections in this book will help *you* get over overeating.

Here's how some teens get unstable tables: Let's say someone goes on a diet and tries to eat less and exercise more. That doesn't usually work over time if the person doesn't deal with the feelings he or she is eating over. Some teens go to counseling to talk about their feelings, but if they don't deal with their eating habits and learn how to let go of strict dieting and unhealthy overeating, they won't feel good in their body. Some try to fill up their lives with fun activities, but if they don't deal with their thoughts and learn how to be nicer to themselves, they don't really enjoy the things they're doing.

Hopefully you can see where this is going. To build a stable table, you need to deal with all four of the important sections in this book: feelings, thoughts, body, and filling up. The good news is that you don't have to learn them all perfectly and you don't have to learn them fast. And even more good news: there will be no homework assignments, no tests, and no grades! But over time, if you practice the activities in this book, at your own pace, you *can* get over overeating and be healthier in many areas of your life. Getting over overeating is about *way* more than just food. It involves all the things you're about to learn. Let's get started!

At <http://www.newharbinger.com/34985>, you can also download some podcasts to help you along in your journey.

You'll find instructions at the back of the book for accessing these materials.

SECTION 1

HEALING WHAT YOU'RE FEELING

This section will teach you lots of different ways to cope with difficult feelings so you won't have to stuff them down with extra food.

hear from a peer

I pretty much used to think my only feelings were hungry, fat, or full. I had to learn a whole new language of feelings and what to do with them. I never knew what to do when I felt really stressed, other than eat. Overeating felt good while I did it, but I always felt horrible when I was done. Dealing with my feelings is hard when I do it, but I feel so much better the next day.

Olivia

emotions 101

One of the most important parts of being human is the fact that we have human emotions—all the time. Unfortunately, a lot of us are taught that the only emotion we're supposed to feel is happy, and that our other emotions (like sad, scared, mad, frustrated, or lonely) are not so good to have. Sure, some emotions feel better than others, but the truth is, we're *all* supposed to have *all* kinds of feelings, *all* the time. That's why we were born with them!

One of the biggest reasons people overeat is to try to stuff down their painful feelings. Overeating is like saying “go away” to your feelings, especially painful ones. The only problem is that when we overeat to try to make our pain go away, it ends up causing more pain. This is because once we finish eating, we still have the original feelings we ate over, *plus* all the feelings we have from overeating. It's a good try, though. Food does give us some comfort and distraction—for a little while anyway.

Once you learn healthy ways to deal with your feelings, you'll no longer need to use food like a drug, to try to make your feelings go away, and you can eat what you really like, in healthy amounts.

So if all feelings are natural, normal, and necessary, what exactly are we supposed to do with them if we're not going to stuff them down with extra food?

We have a few choices:

- We can stuff them down and try to pretend they aren't there.
- We can blast them out in unhealthy ways, such as yelling or violence or road rage.
- We can learn how to welcome them and let them out in

safe, respectful ways.

for you to do

Think back through your day and write down all the feelings you remember having, including any you're having right now. (Oh, and by the way, feelings are usually one word, except for “fat,” “bad,” and “good.” These are thoughts, not feelings, but more on that later!)

For example:

This morning I felt mad when I got up. At school, I felt sad, bored, and lonely. Now I feel confused and sort of hopeful, and a little hopeless.

Okay, now your turn. Here's a list to get you started, and feel free to add any other feelings you have:

Sad	Discouraged	Embarrassed	Worried
Scared	Anxious	Loving	Insecure
Happy	Bored	Loved	Intimidated
Unhappy	Depressed	Hopeful	Confident
Angry	Confused	Hopeless	Proud
Lonely	Guilty	Excited	_____
Frustrated	Jealous	Calm	_____
Annoyed	Grateful	Overwhelmed	_____
Irritated	Rage	Terrified	_____
Disappointed	Ashamed	Nervous	_____

Remember, there are no good or bad feelings; just human emotions that we all feel. And here's something cool—you can

feel sad and happy at the same time, or, like the example you read, you can feel hopeful about something and hopeless about it or something else!

Today I felt or am feeling:

more to do

Another really important skill in dealing with your feelings is being able to sit with them without having to *do* something to try to make them go away. Once you start identifying the feelings you're having and allowing yourself to have them, you'll find that they'll eventually go away on their own, sometimes pretty quickly.

Let's try an experiment. Pick one emotion you're having right now and notice where you feel it in your body. See if you can just notice that sensation without putting any label, story, judgment, or criticism on it. Try paying attention to the sensation like you would notice a cloud in the sky. It's not good or bad. It's just something you feel.

Try noticing the feeling in your body for just a minute and see what happens. See if it feels tense or tight or tingly. See if you imagine it to be a color or a shape. See if it feels warm or cold. Now imagine that as you breathe, your breath is like a warm breeze going right through your entire body. As you take a few deep breaths, notice if the sensation inside you gets stronger or lighter, or stays the same.

sad and mad aren't bad

Most of us got yelled at or teased when we were little kids. That usually left us feeling bad inside. And then we thought, *I must be bad*. Young kids don't have the logic to know that the reason they just got yelled at or teased is because the other person was in a terrible mood and didn't know how to handle his or her own feelings.

On the road to getting over overeating, it's really important to learn that your feelings are not bad and you are not bad when you're having big feelings. Feelings are the natural reactions we have inside our bodies as a result of what happens in our lives. They also help us become aware of our needs. We have physical feelings, like hungry, tired, energized, or cold. And we have emotional feelings, like happy, sad, mad, lonely, bored, proud, and many more.

Most feelings are one word, and we experience them in our bodies. They are not good or bad or right or wrong. If you feel sad, that's how you feel. If you feel angry, that's how you feel. Even though "bad" is one word, it's more of a judgment on your feelings. When people say, "I feel bad," they might have sadness inside of them or fear or loneliness, and they think that *they* or their *feelings* are bad. When people say, "I feel fat," the real feeling underneath might be scared or insecure.

Thoughts, as opposed to feelings, are our beliefs, ideas, and opinions. Thoughts aren't necessarily facts, although many people believe all their thoughts, and this can cause a lot of pain. (More on that in section 2!)

I'm going to share one of the best-kept secrets that will help you throughout your entire life if you promise to remember it: the main reason people suffer is because of their thoughts, not because of their feelings or what happens to them. As you learn to manage your painful feelings and challenge your negative