

Non-hunger eating: The Eating Blueprint approach, part 3



Jen Nash

Clinical Psychologist,
Chartered with the British
Psychological Society,
London

About this series

This article is the third piece in a six-part series that outlines a number of strategies involved in the Eating Blueprint Starter Programme, designed to provide the psychological skills to support traditional weight management advice. It is a direct continuation of the comment in issue 4 of this journal (pages 116–7).

This article covers the next five of these strategies, again themed around the letter F. Nurses may wish to use some of these strategies in their time-limited consultations.

Family

We don't eat food in a vacuum. Food connects us as people, and it has become a way of communicating among families: we can say things with food that might be difficult to say in words. For many of us, for example, it may be challenging to say "I love you," or "I'm worried about you" to those we are close to. It can be so much easier to say "You've had a hard day, let's treat ourselves and get a takeaway tonight," or "I'll cook you your favourite meal to take your mind off it."

Of course, there is nothing wrong with using food to "speak" in these ways; in fact, it is human to do so. The difficulty emerges when the tendency to use food to communicate in our families becomes the default and is done unconsciously.

When considering food in one's household, here are three types of family member that might be recognisable in this context:

1. Feeders – those you feel you cannot say no to (as described in the first part of this series).
2. Saboteurs – those who seem to derail your efforts to change.
3. Connectors – those who use food to relate/connect.

I encourage the people I see to consider whether they have any of these family members in their lives, or whether they recognise themselves in any of the descriptions. Remember, there is no blame attached to any of these archetypes; we are all generally doing the best we can. The aim, rather, is to raise awareness of the impact others in their families might be having on them and to make different choices, if they wish to.

In the Eating Blueprint programme, I explain in further detail how each of these types of people are motivated by love and give practical ideas about how to have authentic conversations and say no in graceful ways to those in our lives who are showing love through food. Most people can be guided to "give us love" in another way, such as:

- "Thank you, what I've had is delicious but I

couldn't manage any more. I would love a top-up of my drink, though, please!"

- "Thanks, that was lovely, I feel so full! Tell me... (where did you get the recipe/how did you cook it?/another distracting question)"

Forgetting

It is very easy to forget our health and weight loss goals and start eating without thinking. It is human nature to do this; in the not-too-distant past, our ancestors had to live much more "in the moment" because, in their hostile worlds, they did not know if they were going to survive the day – so it was pretty pointless to think beyond the here-and-now! Now the modern world has turned us upside down: we need to consider long-term goals in the face of abundant short-term food pleasure!

It is no wonder that we sometimes forget to make the healthiest choice. When life is full of competing priorities, it can often feel like our weight loss goals are the easiest ones to lose track of. Changing habits is hard, and even habits that are clearly no longer serving us are hard to break because they are familiar and comfortable. Therefore, I encourage people to consider creating reminders in their environment to help them rewrite their programming and NOT forget. For example, they can place post-it notes or physical objects like pebbles/shells in their kitchen, desk drawer, bag or purse – anything that, when they see it throughout the day, will remind them of their goals.

Frustration

Feeling stressed because we're putting others' needs and priorities before our own can be a common trigger for eating. An important human need is a feeling of mastery or accomplishment. If we can't master our circumstances, we can certainly master the muffin, McDonald's, or macaroni and cheese! And, of course, with all the things going on that might be overwhelming us, this also gives us a bit of much needed me-time!

If I'm seeing someone who knows they get easily frustrated, I invite them to experiment with thinking about what THEY need today. I ask them:

1. "What's the One Thing that, if you got it started or sorted today, you'd go to bed tonight feeling satisfied no matter what else had happened or was left to be done?"
2. "When today will you do this thing?"

People need to "know themselves" when they consider this. They should not plan to do it first thing in the morning if that's when they're rushing around on the school run. They need to make a date with themselves, like they would if they were seeing a friend or going to the dentist. People prioritise the latter things because they've made a commitment to someone else. They should commit to themselves and their One Thing in the same way.

Fatigue

Eating when we're tired is very natural. Food can provide us with an energy burst to get us through the day and, when used after a particularly rough sleep or late night (at the bar or by the cot), it can be a much needed survival strategy. I often remind the people I see that "Sometimes only a chocolate bar will do!" and that they should not be too hard on themselves.

However, if eating to deal with tiredness is happening on more days than not, then it is probably not the best strategy. Remember, the only problem that food can truly fix is hunger, and people who are regularly using it to cope with tiredness are more likely creating another layer of problems on top of the actual struggle of the tiredness itself. This is when it is important to get to the root cause.

I encourage people to consider why they are regularly tired. If there isn't any obvious clue then a trip to the GP may be a good call but, beyond this, the solution may be about finding a night-time routine that will help. In order to give themselves the best possible chance of getting a good night's sleep, I go back to my old staple and invite people to learn from the babies they know! Think about all of the care and attention that often goes into preparing a baby for bed:

- A regular bed time?
- A bath?
- A soothing drink?
- A relaxing story or lullaby?
- A teddy bear for comfort?

Just like eating, sleeping well is a skill and I teach lots of how-to's to the members of the Eating Blueprint community. As an initial exercise, however, I ask people to think about what regularly gets them fatigued and what their grown-up version of a night-time routine might be. Using the Sleep Sounds app instead of asking someone to sing them a lullaby is optional!

"F*** it!"

This is a tongue-in-cheek way of describing the well-known experience of being on a weight-loss programme; eating something "wrong"; thinking "I've blown it"; concluding "F*** it, I might as well really go for it!"; and overeating for the rest of the day. This is the diet mindset at its worst because, when we are "on" a diet plan, as soon as we veer "off" it we are failing. And if we've already failed, then what is another chocolate, cake or bowl of ice cream going to matter?

Some people are naturally more prone to those "F*** it!" moments than others. If you are a perfectionist, a natural follower of rules or don't like losing a game (who does?!), you might notice the discomfort of this F more easily. After all, getting off track from a diet is very much like losing a game – and who likes continuing a game that's already been lost?

But why not just play a new game? With different rules? Who made up these rules anyway?! Therefore, I invite anyone who struggles with those "F*** it!" moments to simply change the rules of the game. What if the new rule is that, if they slip from the diet, they have to:

- Say hello to a stranger?
- Go to the next room and back?
- Find a cause to donate £1 to?
- Hug a friend?
- Do a silly dance?

As ridiculous as these rules sound, there is an important lesson in this experiment: it is THE INDIVIDUAL who is in control of the rules they make about food – not the diet mindset, not what they've learned from others and not the default "should" they have been following their whole life. They can change the rules any time they like. In fact, I encourage them to! Anything that deconditions this "F*** it!" self-sabotage is a good thing. ■

About the Eating Blueprint

The Eating Blueprint is a "psychological skills" approach to weight management, equipping individuals with a simple-to-use toolkit of strategies delivered within an online/video programme.

The Eating Blueprint method was created by Dr Jen Nash, Chartered Psychologist.

A recovered emotional eater herself, Jen has spent the last 10 years immersed in the heart and mind of eating behaviour, unlocking the missing link of her own food-weight journey, and she now loves nothing more than to inspire others to find theirs.

The programme is available for NHS commissioning or, alternatively, the strategies in this article are available as a book and accompanying online Starter Programme for £12. To access or for further information, please email:

hello@eatingblueprint.com

For a free information pack, register your name and email address at:

www.EatingBlueprint.com



**Read more
online**

Mindfulness in healthy weight and diabetes

Lucy Aphramor introduces the concept of mindfulness and describes how it can be used to help with healthy eating.

Journal of Diabetes Nursing
19: 401–7

Available at:

<https://is.gd/mindfulnessjdn>