

Study Guide for
Why We Overeat and How to Stop
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This book can be discussed in many different ways. Whatever feels productive and enlightening for you and/or your group is the right way. Here are some suggestions in case you'd like some help getting started.

Part One—Unintended Consequences of Modern Life

This part of the book is full of information that is common knowledge, yet many people report feeling shocked at the reality of it when they see it summarized here.

1. Which facts, statistics, or trends shocked you the most, and why?
 - a. How do you see them reflected in the people around you?
2. As you consider your memories from childhood, what do you notice now about how your practices (choices of food and activities) and those of your family have changed over time?
 - a. How have those changes added to your quality of life overall, and how have they detracted from it?
3. What do you think you might want to start doing differently now that you're looking at the big picture with greater clarity? What would be the easiest ways for you to start?

Part Two—The Deep Origins of Overeating

1. Which points from this section stood out to you the most, and why?
2. "Feelings overpower facts." When in your life does this most often happen to you?
 - a. How do things tend to work out when your emotional brain is left in charge?
3. What aspects of your lifestyle might put your emotional brain in harm's way?
 - a. What adjustments could you make to create a greater margin of safety for your emotional brain?
4. Make a list of the life experiences that have brought you the most enjoyment, fulfillment, and satisfaction.
 - a. Reflect on the fact that *all* of these feelings come to you from your emotional brain, including the gratitude you feel for them.
5. Which of your current activities already give you emotional satisfaction with no downside?
 - a. How can you spend more time in those activities and others like them?
 - b. What are your obstacles to spending more time like this, and how can you begin to address them?

Part Three—Common Psychological Hurdles

Chapter 12. The Fallacy of Normal

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Who do you know that is happy, healthy, and at peace with food?
 - a. If you know such a person, can you learn anything from them by observation or even a conversation with them about how they do it?
 - b. How does it affect your perception of yourself when you realize how few people actually behave in the ways you're thinking of as "normal?"
3. Which aspects of being a balanced eater do you find attractive, and why?
4. Which aspects of being a balanced eater give you pause, and why?
 - a. Explore whether your concerns are realistic and if so, what you could do to mitigate them.

Chapter 13. All-or-Nothing Thinking

1. What are your most common all-or-nothing thoughts?
2. How do they affect the quality of your choices and your life?
3. What are some thought substitutions you could make that would be more accurate and empowering?

Chapter 14. Fear of Getting Nutrition Wrong

1. Does confusion about nutritional information sometimes make it difficult for you to choose from your various food options?
 - a. If so, consider examples of when this happens to you.
2. What are your default criteria for food selection (i.e., cost, convenience, taste, etc.) when you're not sure what the "right" choice would be or don't feel like thinking about it?
 - a. What long-term impact do you think these default choices have on your health and your ability to enjoy life in the ways that you desire? Why?
3. Consider the general principles from the subsection, "All You Really Need to Know," and how you can use them to simplify your approach to nutrition going forward.

Chapter 15. Critical Misperceptions

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Consider some examples of when your emotional brain misdefines food in ways that ultimately leave you more unhappy in the long-term.
3. Some foods can be enjoyed in moderation, while others are simply too triggering to manage. It's different for everybody. Which foods fall into each of those categories for you?
4. Describe in full detail any positive feelings and other benefits you've enjoyed during the more physically active times in your life.
5. Do you feel guilty about taking time out to take care of yourself? Where does that come from?
 - a. Name at least three ways that your loved ones benefit from you being healthier and stronger.

6. Looking at the sample dialogue on pages 70-72 (“Adding It All Up”), think of a food challenge in your own life where you could try this. Consider writing it out, making sure that you keep it absolutely honest and realistic. Beware slipping into the pattern of trying to boss your emotional brain around, as this is frustrating and ineffective.

Chapter 16. Misuse of the Brain in Decision-Making

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. How can you tell when you’re operating mostly from your emotional brain? What are the signs? How does it feel?
3. How can you tell when you’re using a more coordinated-brain approach? What are the signs? How does it feel?
4. Which areas of your life would probably turn out better than they do now if you were able to use a coordinated-brain approach more of the time?

Chapter 17. Deep Change Takes Time

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Have you ever attempted a 30-day change in your habits?
 - a. How did it work out and how did you feel about the process after the fact?
3. Think of something you do very differently now than you did ten years ago.
 - a. Did anything trigger the change to occur rapidly? If so, what was it?
 - b. If not, how did you grow into the change over time?

Chapter 18. The Body of Your Dreams vs. the Body in Your Mirror

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Pretend you live in a strange world where physical activity confers all of the usual benefits except that it can’t cause your weight to change.
 - a. What are the benefits of physical activity that you’d still want even though your weight would stay the same? List as many as you can.
3. This is a strange world indeed, because eating nutritional whole foods also confers all of the usual benefits except for causing your weight to change.
 - a. What are the benefits of eating nutritional foods that you’d still want even though your weight would stay the same? List as many as you can.

Chapter 19. Maintaining Motivation

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. What motivated your past attempts at change, and how long did that typically keep you going?
3. What do you *really* want for yourself?
 - a. How would your life be different if you achieved this?
 - b. How would you feel?
 - c. What would you be able to do that is difficult or impossible for you today?

Chapter 20. Daring to be Different

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Do you feel pressure to conform to group norms involving food and eating? If yes, in which groups do you notice this?
3. How does the group react or respond when one of the members attempts to change?
4. Is there any personal relationship you are especially fearful about damaging if you adopt healthier practices? (answer for as many relationships as necessary)
 - a. What makes you think this relationship might be at risk?
 - b. What do you think would motivate this person to discourage or interfere with your taking better care of yourself?

Chapter 21. Putting It All Together

1. Which parts of the summary apply to you? Which don't?
2. How much of this do you see playing out in others around you?

Part Four—Building a Stronger Base for Your Future

Chapter 22. Our Need for Reward: The Key to It All

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Which feelings bring the most satisfaction to your days, and when are you most likely to experience them?
3. How much of your time do you spend in ways that generate these feelings?
4. What small life adjustments could you make that would allow you to experience these feelings more often?

Chapter 23. Using Rewards to Drive Results

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Most things in life get done one small step at a time.
 - a. In which parts of your life are you good at remembering this?
 - b. In which parts of your life do you need to remind yourself of this more often? How can you make sure you do that?
3. Life feels better and is more successful if each day includes some emotional rewards, but they are only truly rewarding if they don't carry a painful downside later on.
 - a. Are you getting quality rewards at the level necessary to keep you energized and focused on a daily basis?
 - b. If not, what can you do to create more opportunities for them?
4. How often do you pause to reflect on your reasons for gratitude?
 - a. How does it affect your mood and energy level when you do?
 - b. How often would you *like* to do this, and how can you make that happen?

Chapter 24. Dealing with Unwanted Feelings and Bad Days

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. How many legs do you have under your life table, and what are they?
 - a. How many would you like to have?
 - b. If you need an addition or two, what are the most likely candidates?
3. Which of the ideas for healthy self-care do you already practice consistently enough, and which do you think you would benefit from doing more?

Chapter 25. Taking Care of Yourself When You Least Feel Like It

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. What are the early signs that your mood might be starting to slip? Think of as many as you can; it's even better if you write them down so that you'll remain more aware of them.
3. Which of your choices tend to stabilize and raise your mood, and which choices tend to contribute to its decline?
4. When you notice some early warnings of depression, what's one thing you could try doing differently that might work better for you than what you've done in the past at such times?

Chapter 26. Thinking More Effectively About Food

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. What do you now recognize in your self-talk that has probably been keeping you stuck?
3. What are some substitutions you might try, to see if they work better for you?

Chapter 27. Planning for Long-Term Success

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. What food-related plans do you already use to good effect?
3. What ideas do you have for improving your system?

Chapter 28. Risk Management: The Zones

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. About how much of your waking time is currently spent in each zone?
 - a. What do you think about this now that you're aware of it?
3. What are some ways that you could reduce your time in the orange and red zones, increasing the time you spend in the green and yellow zones?

Chapter 29. Being Part of the Solution: Support of Others

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. When are you most likely to encourage others to eat or to accept food from you?
3. What needs of yours are you trying to meet when you do this, and how else could you address them?

Chapter 30. Living More, Eating Less

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. If you believe food is too large a presence in your life, consider making a list of the various needs for which you use it.
 - a. Now, make a list of some non-food alternatives you could experiment with for at least some of those needs, just to see how it works out for you.
 - b. When you meet those needs in non-food ways, which aspects of your life improve?
 - c. Does meeting those needs in non-food ways detract from any aspect of your life? If so, how can you mitigate that?

Chapter 31. Moving as if Your Life Depends on It

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Which ideas from this chapter are most attractive or interesting to your emotional brain?
3. How can you begin using more of these ideas in your day-to-day practices?

Part Five—Eating with Dignity and Enjoyment for Life

Chapter 32. Eating to Live

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. In terms of food, how safe is your home and what can you do to make it safer?
3. What are your personal signs of hunger, and what sometimes causes you to overlook or ignore them?
4. Which circumstances support your ability to eat with mindful enjoyment, and which circumstances interfere with it?
5. How many of your meals in a week are currently based on food that you prepared for yourself at home? If you wanted to increase that number, what would be the easiest ways for you to do it?
6. Do you have an adequate amount of food-free space in your life? If not, what are some simple adjustments you could make which would give you more of it?
7. Take a look at the dinnerware that you most often use. Is it sized to help you with portion management?

Chapter 33. Keeping It Together in Challenging Situations

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. Take some time now to start developing your list of Things to Do Instead. It's essential to have some of these ideas available as soon as possible so that they'll be there for you the next time you need them.
3. What might work for you as emergency escape food? You might need to have a few different alternatives to cover varying needs and circumstances.
4. You need to stay on duty whenever you're around food. Think now about an easy, effective way to remind yourself of this when necessary. It might be something you say to yourself, something

you wear or carry with you, a memory that you call up intentionally—anything at all that helps you to keep your focus when you need it.

Chapter 34. Pros and Cons of Some Familiar Strategies

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. How will you use this information to strengthen your own system?

Chapter 35. Beyond Overeating

1. Which points from this chapter stood out to you the most, and why?
2. What do you think about the notion that “being on the road to getting better—even with potholes and detours—still feels better than being out of control?”

Appendices

Appendix A: The Challenge of Evenings

1. How does this material relate to your personal experience?
2. What might you try doing differently in order to make your evenings easier and safer?

Appendix B: Considerations for Restaurant Buffets

1. How does this material relate to your personal experience?
2. When does the possibility of a buffet most often arise in your life, and what safer alternatives might you plan for or suggest to others instead?

Appendix C: Safe Enjoyment of Special Occasion Meals

1. How does this material relate to your personal experience?
2. What might you try doing differently when you are attending special occasion meals as a guest?

Appendix D: Hosting Special Occasion Meals

1. How does this material relate to your personal experience?
2. What might you try doing differently when you are hosting special occasion meals?

Appendix E: Considerations and Strategies for Travel

1. How does this material relate to your personal experience?
2. What might you try doing differently in the future for the various types of trips that you take?