8 Traits of Emotional Hunger

Emotional and physical hunger can feel identical, unless you've learned to identify their distinguishing characteristics. The nest time you feel voraciously hungry, look for these signals that your appetite may be based on emotions rather than true physical need. This awareness may head off an emotional overeating episode.
Source: Virtue, Doreen. Constant Craving A-Z. (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 1999)

EMOTIONAL HUNGER	*PHYSICAL HUNGER*
1. Is sudden. One minute you're not thinking about food, the next minute you're starving. Your hunger goes from 0-60 with in a short period of time.	**1. Is gradual.** Your stomach rumbles. One hour later, it growls. Physical hunger gives you steadily progressive clues that it's time to eat.
2. Is for a specific food. Your cravings are for one specific type of food, such as chocolate, pasta, or a cheeseburger. With emotional eating, you feel you need to eat that particular food. No substitute will do!	**2. Is open to different foods.** With physical hunger, you have many food preferences, but they are flexible. You are open to alternative choices
3. Is "above the neck". An emotionally based craving begins in the mouth and mind. You mouth wants to taste the pizza or chocolate doughnut. Your mind whirls with thoughts about your desired food.	**3. Is based in the stomach.** Physical hunger is recognizable by stomach sensations. You feel gnawing, rumbling, emptiness, and even pain in your stomach with physical hunger.
4. Is urgent. Emotional hunger urges you to eat NOW to instantly ease emotional pain with food.	**4. Is patient.** Physical hunger would prefer that you ate soon, but doesn't command you to eat at that instant.
5. Is paired with an upsetting emotion. Your boss yelled at you. Your child is in trouble at school. Your spouse is in a bad mood. Emotional hunger occurs in conjunction with an upsetting situation.	**5. Occurs out of physical need.** Physical hunger occurs because it has been four or five hours since your last meal. You may experience light-headedness or low energy if overly hungry.
6. Involves automatic or absent-minded eating. Emotional eating can feel as if someone else's hand is scooping up the ice cream and putting it into your mouth ("automatic eating"). You may not notice that you've eaten a bag of cookies (absent-minded eating).	**6. Involves deliberate choices and awareness of the eating.** With physical hunger, you are aware of the food on your fork, in your mouth, and in your stomach. You consciously choose whether to eat half your sandwich or the whole thing.
7. Does not notice, or stop eating, in response to fullness. Emotional overeating stems from a desire to cover up painful feelings. The person stuffs her/him self to deaden troubling emotions and will eat second and third helpings, even though his/her stomach may hurt from over-fullness.	**7. Stops when full.** Physical hunger stems from a desire to fuel and nourish the body. As soon as that intention is fulfilled, the person stops eating.
8. Feels guilty about eating. The paradox of emotional overeating is that the person eats to feel better and ends up beating him/her self for eating cookies, cakes, or cheeseburgers. She/he promises atonements to him/ her self ("I'll start my diet tomorrow.")	**8. Realizes eating is necessary.** When the intent behind eating is based in physical hunger, there is no guilt or shame. The person realizes that eating food, like breathing oxygen, is a necessary behavior.