

ADVANCE READER COPY

Stop Emotional Eating: The Simple Method That Actually Works

Coming July 4th, 2026

Hi,

This is an advance copy of my new book — and I'd genuinely love your help getting it off the ground.

It's a short read — you can get through it in one sitting. If it resonates with you, the one thing that would make the biggest difference at launch is an **honest review posted on Amazon on launch day**.

It doesn't need to be long. A sentence or two about what you found useful, what worked, what didn't — that's it. *Just please mention that you received a free advance copy in exchange for your review.*

I'll send you an email when the book goes live with the Amazon link and instructions for posting your review.

Thank you — I genuinely appreciate it.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

James Goldney
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For anyone who's tried everything else

STOP EMOTIONAL EATING

The Simple Method That
Actually Works

James Goldney



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Disclaimer: This book is intended for general informational purposes only and does not constitute medical or psychological advice. The author is not a licensed healthcare professional. If you are experiencing a clinical eating disorder or mental health condition, please seek support from a qualified professional.

To your next smile — your superpower.

“I've spent my career at the intersection of technology and human behavior, and I know how rarely simple solutions survive contact with complex problems. This one might. Goldney writes honestly, argues clearly, and offers something practical rather than merely inspiring.”

—David Ellis, Futurist; Research Consultant for Surgical Innovation,
Wayne State University School of Medicine

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Introduction: Brace Yourself — This Might Actually Be Fun

Here's something nobody has ever said to you about losing weight:

This is going to be fun.

Go ahead, read that again. I'll wait.

I know. It sounds insane. Weight loss and fun belong together the way cats and bathtubs do — technically possible, deeply unnatural, and someone usually ends up miserable.

But hear me out, because this is important: the reason most approaches to emotional eating feel like slow, grinding misery is not because change has to be hard. It's because they're built on the wrong foundation. They're asking you to suffer your way to success — white-knuckle through cravings, feel guilty when you slip, repeat until you either win or give up.

Most people give up.

And honestly? Can you blame them?

Here's what I want to tell you before we go any further. The method in this book works with your emotions, not against them. In fact — and this is the part that's going to sound strange — it uses your emotions as the engine. The very thing that's been driving you toward the fridge at 10pm is the same thing that's going to drive you away from it.

That's not a gimmick. It's just neuroscience, applied in a way nobody thought to tell you about.

I found this out the hard way.

Four years ago, I pulled an old wetsuit out of my garage. I'd been a recreational windsurfer — genuinely loved it, lived for it — and after fifteen years away from the water, I was finally going back. I was ready.

The wetsuit told me otherwise.

It was way too tight. And I mean way too tight — we're talking sausage-casing territory. I stood there in my garage, holding this piece of neoprene that used to fit me perfectly, and had one of those moments of uncomfortable, unavoidable truth.

I'd gained over 30 pounds. Slowly, invisibly, over fifteen years of not paying attention. And a significant chunk of it had nothing to do with what I knew about nutrition or what I intended to eat. It was emotional. Stress. Habit. Boredom. Eating because something felt good in the moment, again and again, until it added up.

I knew what I was supposed to do. I'd known for years. Knowing had not helped.

What eventually helped was understanding why knowing doesn't help — and finding something that actually worked in the moments when I needed it most. Not willpower. Not a meal plan. Something that felt, genuinely, almost like cheating.

It worked — and four years later it's still working. I'm back on the water about once a week, roughly the weight I was in college, and the wetsuit fits. But *how* it worked isn't what you'd expect, and it's worth getting into properly. I'll come back to it in a moment.

That's what this book is about.

A few things it is not: it's not a diet. It's not a calorie-counting system. It's not a 12-week transformation program with a meal prep guide. It won't tell you which foods are evil or make you weigh your pasta. If that's what you're looking for, there are approximately four thousand other books on Amazon for you.

What this is: a practical behavioral method for breaking the emotional eating cycle — one you can use in the actual moment, when the feeling hits and the food is right there. It's grounded in behavioral science, it doesn't require willpower to sustain, and — I'm saying this again because I mean it — it has an element that I think you're going to genuinely enjoy.

Let's get into it.

Chapter 1: Why You Keep Doing It (And Why It's Not Your Fault — Mostly)

The part where I don't tell you to try harder

You've tried harder. We can skip that.

You've done the willpower thing. You've made the decision, drawn the line, started fresh on Monday. Some of those Mondays probably went pretty well. And then something happened — a bad day, a dull evening, an argument, a work deadline, a Tuesday — and the line got crossed, and you ate the thing, and then you felt terrible about eating the thing, and then you ate more things because you already blew it so why not.

If that cycle sounds familiar, welcome. You're in the right place.

Here's the first thing I want you to understand, and I want you to actually sit with this rather than just reading past it: emotional eating is not a discipline problem. It's not evidence that you're weak, or that you don't want it badly enough. It is a brain problem — specifically, a very logical response that your brain developed to handle emotional discomfort, which then got so well-practiced that it became automatic.

You're not out of control. You're running a program your brain wrote. The good news is that programs can be rewritten.

So what actually is emotional eating?

Simple definition: eating in response to feelings rather than physical hunger.

When you're genuinely hungry and you eat, the eating solves the problem. Hunger goes away, you move on, end of story. When you eat because you're stressed, bored, anxious, or acting on autopilot, the eating doesn't solve anything — because food was never the actual problem. The uncomfortable feeling is still there when you finish. Often you've added guilt to it, which, as we'll get to shortly, makes everything worse.

The pattern that most emotional eaters know intimately: feel something uncomfortable → eat → feel briefly better → feel worse than before → repeat.

That loop isn't random. It's learned. And understanding what's driving it is the first step to interrupting it.

What sets it off

Research on emotional eating has consistently linked it to negative emotional states — stress, anxiety, sadness, and boredom being the most commonly studied.¹

Stress is the most recognized trigger. When you're under pressure — work, relationships, money, the general low-grade chaos of modern life — your nervous system activates. Eating, particularly comfort foods, initiates a complex series of neurochemical responses that temporarily reduce that activation. It's a genuine, physiological form of relief. Short-lived, with

costs that accumulate over time, but real in the moment. Your brain is not stupid for learning this — it found something that works and filed it away.²

Boredom is less dramatic but remarkably persistent. When the brain is understimulated, it goes looking for something to do, and food is an easy, accessible source of stimulation. Research has specifically linked boredom to increased eating, independent of hunger or mood.³ This is why the kitchen becomes suddenly interesting the moment you have nothing else going on.

Anxiety operates similarly to stress but tends to be more chronic — a background hum of worry rather than an acute event. For many people, eating provides a sense of groundedness or distraction when things feel uncertain or out of control. Something to do. Something concrete when everything else feels abstract.

Habit is the most automatic of all. This is eating that's become attached to context rather than feeling — you eat when you watch TV, every time, not because you're hungry or even particularly emotional, but because you've done it a thousand times and the association is now hardwired. Researchers call this cue-dependent behavior: the cue (TV, car, kitchen) triggers the behavior automatically, almost without conscious involvement.⁴

Most people dealing with emotional eating recognize themselves in more than one of these. Many recognize all four at different times.

Why it works — and why that's the whole problem

Here's something diet culture almost never acknowledges: emotional eating works. Not long-term. Not in any way that serves you. But in the moment, it genuinely does what your brain is trying to get it to do. The relief is real. The comfort is real. The brief neurochemical shift is real.

Your brain found a tool that produces reliable short-term results and it keeps reaching for it. That's not irrational. That's exactly how brains work.

The problem is the time gap between the benefit and the cost. The relief lasts maybe ten minutes. The guilt, the weight gain, the sense of being out of control — those are cumulative and slow. But your brain's automatic systems don't operate on a long-term timeline. They respond to what's working right now.

This is the core mismatch. And it's why trying to solve emotional eating with logic — "I know I shouldn't do this, so I won't" — is a bit like trying to convince a fire to stop burning by explaining that it's dangerous. The fire doesn't speak logic. Neither does the part of your brain running the emotional eating pattern.

The shame spiral — why beating yourself up is making it worse

Let's talk about the move that almost everyone makes and that almost always backfires.

You eat emotionally. You feel guilty. You tell yourself you're weak, you have no self-control, you're never going to change. You use the shame as a motivational tool — if you feel bad enough about it, maybe you'll stop.

Here's the problem with that plan: guilt and self-criticism are themselves forms of emotional discomfort. They activate stress responses. They produce anxiety. And what does your brain do with emotional discomfort?

It reaches for the thing that reliably makes it feel better.

Which is the food.

You have essentially created a shame-powered eating machine. Every episode produces guilt, guilt produces stress, stress triggers eating, eating produces guilt. Round and round. The self-criticism isn't putting the brakes on the pattern — it's the gas.

This isn't a therapy book and I'm not here to unpack your relationship with your inner critic. But I will say this clearly: the approach in this book does not run on shame. Not a drop of it. What it runs on is something considerably more effective and — I'll keep saying it — considerably more enjoyable.

So where does that leave us?

You've got an automatic pattern, built from years of repetition, that hands you real short-term relief and a pile of slow-accumulating costs. Willpower hasn't fixed it. Shame has actively fed it. Logic bounces off it.

That's not a dead end. It just means the answer isn't *more* of what hasn't worked — more trying, more guilt, more good intentions. The answer is to understand what's actually running the show down there, and then learn to speak to it in a language it understands.

Which is exactly what the next chapter is about.

Chapter 2: Your Brain Is Not Broken — It's Just Confused

The most important thing nobody told you

In the last chapter I said emotional eating isn't a willpower failure — it's a learned pattern. Here's what makes that more than a consolation prize: if the problem isn't a broken *you*, then the problem is a fixable one. You've just been using the wrong tool.

It's a bit like trying to fix a screw with a hammer. The hammer isn't defective. The screw isn't defective. The tool just doesn't match the job. You can hammer that screw as enthusiastically as you like — and a lot of diet culture is essentially a very loud crowd cheering you on to hammer harder — but the result is going to be a mangled screw and a sore arm. And probably a dent in the wall.

The right tool for emotional eating is not more willpower or stricter rules. It's something that works with how your brain actually operates. And to understand why that matters, you need to understand something genuinely interesting about how your brain makes decisions.

Two systems, one brain, constant argument

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman — who won the Nobel Prize for his work on human decision-making — identified something that, once you understand it, explains an enormous amount of puzzling human behavior.⁵

Your brain doesn't operate as a single unified system making rational decisions. It operates as two fundamentally different systems running simultaneously, with different speeds, different priorities, and different definitions of what a "good decision" looks like.

I'm going to call them your Autopilot and your Thinker, because those names are more honest about what they actually do.

Your Thinker is the part of you that can lay out every reason why eating when you're not hungry isn't serving you. It makes plans, reads nutrition labels, decides to eat better starting Monday, and generally understands what the sensible choice is. It's capable and intelligent, but it has a significant weakness: it runs on a limited fuel supply. Use it hard enough for long enough, and it gets tired. Most people find their resolve is weakest when they're tired and stressed — not a coincidence, and not a character flaw.

Your Autopilot is fast. Automatic. Emotional. It runs in the background constantly, processing information and generating responses before your conscious mind has even registered what's happening. It's been shaped by evolution, habit, and every experience you've ever had. It does not care about your long-term goals. It cares about right now.

Here's the dynamic that explains your entire history with emotional eating:

Most of the time, when things are calm and you're not particularly stressed or tired, your Thinker can hold the wheel. You make the salad. You walk past the vending machine. You feel good about your choices.

Then life happens. You have a hard day. You're tired. You're stressed. You're restless at 9pm. Your Thinker — already running on fumes — tries to hold the line. And your Autopilot, which never gets tired, which has thousands of repetitions of "uncomfortable feeling → eat something → feel better" filed away, simply takes over.

I remember the first time I understood this properly. Not intellectually — I'd read Kahneman. I mean the moment I actually caught my Autopilot mid-move. It was a Sunday evening, nothing dramatic, just a low-grade restless feeling I couldn't name. I was in the kitchen before I'd made any conscious decision to be there. That gap — between the feeling and the action — was smaller than I'd imagined. Understanding that changed everything about how I approached the problem.

This is not weakness. This is your brain functioning exactly as designed. The Autopilot is supposed to take over under stress — it's faster, it's efficient, and for most of human evolutionary history, the decisions it made in high-pressure moments were the right ones. The problem is that it learned a solution to emotional discomfort that is incompatible with your wishes. And now it applies that solution automatically, before your Thinker even gets a vote.

Two different languages

Here's the thing about your Autopilot and your Thinker that makes all the difference: they don't speak the same language.

Your Thinker operates rationally in the realm of words, logic, and reason. It can lay out exactly why eating when you're not hungry isn't serving you. It means well.

Your Autopilot operates in something closer to sensation. Feeling. Instinct. Mood. It processes in feeling and instinct — this is uncomfortable, and that thing over there made it stop before. Research on how these two systems communicate — or more accurately, fail to communicate — shows that the experiential, automatic system responds to affect and sensation in ways that logical reasoning simply can't override directly.⁶

This is why you can know, with complete clarity and conviction, that you don't want to eat — and do it anyway. Your Thinker knew. Your Autopilot just kept going, because your Thinker was speaking a language your Autopilot doesn't understand.

So here's the question that actually matters: what language does your Autopilot understand?

Genuine positive feeling. Immediately. Your Autopilot is exquisitely sensitive to emotional state — specifically to the shift from feeling uncomfortable to feeling better. When something produces that shift quickly, the Autopilot notices, files it away, and starts moving toward it automatically.

But here's what that also means: if you can create a different fast, reliable shift from uncomfortable to better — using something other than food — your Autopilot will adopt that instead.

Not through explanation. Not through motivation. Through direct experience, repeated enough times that the new response becomes the automatic one.

That's the entire operating principle of the method in the next chapter. We're not going to reason with your Autopilot. We're going to communicate with it in its own language — one it already speaks, but applied deliberately.

KEY POINT *We need something that can talk directly to your Autopilot — in the language it actually understands.*

Why willpower always loses eventually

Willpower — your Thinker consciously overriding your Autopilot — does work. Sometimes. In the short term, when you're rested and your emotional stakes are low, it works reasonably well.

But it has three fundamental problems as a long-term strategy.

It weakens. Most people notice that self-control is hardest later in the day, after a long or emotionally demanding stretch — precisely the conditions when emotional eating is most likely to occur. You're fighting the battle with your weakest weapon at your most vulnerable moment.

It requires constant effort. Habits and automatic behaviors require no effort to sustain — they just run. Willpower-based resistance requires active effort every single time. One moment of reduced vigilance and the Autopilot moves in.

It produces no learning. Every time you successfully resist emotional eating through willpower, your Autopilot learns nothing useful. It hasn't developed a new response. It's just been temporarily suppressed. The moment willpower relaxes, the old pattern is exactly where it was.

This isn't pessimistic — it's clarifying. Willpower is genuinely useful for some things. Permanently rewiring an automatic emotional response is not one of them.

What actually rewires automatic responses is what the next chapter covers: giving your Autopilot a new, immediate, positive feeling to attach to the moment of emotional discomfort. Repeated enough times, that new experience becomes the new automatic response.

Your Autopilot is trainable. You just need to speak its language.

Your brain learns the same way it learned emotional eating in the first place: repetition and immediate reward. That's not a metaphor — it's the actual mechanism. The pattern stuck because it was repeated thousands of times and paid off immediately, every single time. Replace the payoff — give your Autopilot a different immediate positive feeling, often enough — and the pattern changes at the level it was built.

That's training, not white-knuckling. And training, unlike willpower, can actually be enjoyable — which is the part of this I keep promising and am finally about to deliver.

KEY POINT *Willpower suppresses the pattern temporarily. Training replaces it permanently. These are not the same thing — and confusing them is why most approaches to emotional eating eventually stall.*

Chapter 3: The Method — Meet Your Emotional Superpower

Why "just don't do it" doesn't do it

Here's the plan most people arrive at when they decide to tackle emotional eating:

Feel the urge. Say no. Repeat until fixed.

It's a solid plan. Clean. Simple. Requires no equipment. Has been attempted by virtually every person reading this book, multiple times, with varying degrees of initial success and near-identical long-term results.

The problem isn't commitment. It's that the plan is essentially trying to win an arm wrestle against yourself — and the arm you're wrestling with has been training for years and never gets tired. By now you understand why: your Autopilot feels something uncomfortable, and starts to act before your Thinker even gets a word in. The instinctive answer is to intercept the action. But blocking it every time costs something. And when you're tired, stressed, or just having a Tuesday, the cost is more than you've got.

What we're after is something different. Not blocking the Autopilot, but giving it a new program to run.

Here's where it gets interesting.

Your brain already knows how to do this

Think about the last time a song came on and your mood shifted before you'd even consciously registered what was playing. Or the last time someone smiled at you — a real, warm smile — and you felt something lift slightly in your chest.

You didn't think your way into those responses. They happened automatically, chemically, because your brain is wired to respond to certain emotional inputs with immediate neurochemical shifts. Music, laughter, physical movement, genuine human connection — these aren't just pleasant experiences. They're triggers for real, fast-acting changes in brain chemistry.⁷

Your Autopilot speaks this language fluently. It always has.

The method in this chapter is built on one simple idea: what if you used that response deliberately?

Not waiting for a good song to come on. Not hoping something cheers you up. Deliberately triggering a genuine positive emotional response to replace what emotional eating was trying to satisfy — and doing it consistently enough that your Autopilot starts reaching for that instead.

This is not positive thinking. It's not telling yourself everything is fine when it isn't. It's a specific, physical, repeatable technique that produces a real neurochemical response. Done consistently, it rewires the automatic pattern.

The whole technique is three steps, and the first word of its name spells them out: **S-A-Y**.

S — Smile

A — Acknowledge

Y — YES!

That's the entire method — Smile, Acknowledge, YES! The full name, *SAY YES!*, is just a memory hook: the word *SAY* gives you the three steps in order, and the *YES!* on the end is simply the third step doing double duty, because it's the one that matters most and the one you'll want ringing in your head when a moment hits. Three steps. Not six. If you can remember to say yes, you've already remembered the method.

Step 1: Smile

Not a polite smile. Not a grimace. A real one — or as close as you can get in the moment.

This sounds trivial. It isn't.

There's a longstanding idea in psychology — and growing evidence behind it — that the relationship between expression and emotion runs in both directions. Not just that feelings produce expressions, but that expressions can influence feelings. The practical logic here is straightforward: a deliberate smile is a physical interruption, a signal to your brain that something is shifting. You're not pretending to feel better. You're creating a small but real shift in your internal state.

When the urge to eat emotionally hits — do this first. Smile. Give it two or three seconds. Let your brain receive the signal.

Step 2: Acknowledge

The Acknowledge step does something different. You recognize what's happening — out loud, or in your head, whatever feels right in the moment.

Here's the thing though: you might not always know exactly what triggered it. And that's completely fine.

Often the Autopilot is already three steps ahead before your conscious mind catches up. You don't always get a clear emotional label right away. What you do get — especially after some practice — is a quieter signal: oh, this is one of those moments.

That recognition alone is enough. If you can name it, great:

"I'm stressed right now and I want to eat because of it."

"I'm bored and my brain is looking for something to do."

"I'm anxious and this is my automatic response."

If you can't name it, don't wait for the answer. Don't linger here at all. Acknowledge is the quickest of the three steps by design — it's recognition, not analysis. The moment you've registered *this is one of those moments*, you're done.

And there's a reason to keep it fast. The YES! is the active ingredient — it's what gives your Autopilot the positive shift that interrupts the reach for food. The longer you spend interrogating *why* you feel this way, the longer the old urge keeps running. So recognize it, then go. The "why" can wait — it usually surfaces on its own afterward, and you can always come back and work it out later if it's useful. The method doesn't need it to work.

What the recognition does, even at half a second, is pull you out of autopilot. You've seen the pattern for what it is, which means you're no longer just running it — you're choosing what happens next. That's the whole job of this step. (Affect-labeling research backs it up: even rough, partial naming of an emotion measurably lowers its intensity.⁸ Useful when it comes — never required.)

You've smiled. You've acknowledged it — however partially. Now comes the part that actually makes this fun.

Step 3: YES!

This is where you celebrate. In whatever way produces a real feeling of pleasure or positivity for you in the moment.

Saying "Yes!" out loud with a fist pump may be all it takes.

The neuroscience here is solid. Physical celebration — movement, vocalization, genuine expression of positive emotion — triggers dopamine release.⁹ That's the chemical your Autopilot is actually chasing when it reaches for food. You're giving it what it wants, through a different door.

This step is the key to the SAY YES! technique, so it's worth emphasizing. Your goal is to create a positive, physical and emotional sensation in your body — the very thing your Autopilot was seeking. But you're doing it on your terms, in a way that puts you back in control of the situation.

Here's the part worth taking seriously: the celebration has to be real. It can be subtle, internalized, so long as you create that positive shift. Your Autopilot responds to genuine positive emotional experience, which means you need to do something that actually produces that experience for you.

After a while, I found that with just a subtle "Yes!" and fist pump I could generate what felt like a subtle physiological shift. A positive feeling in my chest and head. Whether this shift is real or psychological for me is irrelevant — it definitely created the desired outcome I was looking for.

People respond differently to this step, and that's entirely the point. What produces a genuine positive shift for one person might feel completely flat for another. You might do something different depending on where you are, who's around, or simply how you feel in the moment. The

only requirement is that it produces a genuine, immediate positive feeling — and that it's authentic to you.

For some people that's quiet and internal — a slow breath and a genuine sense of "I've got this." For others it's more physical and expressive. Neither is more correct than the other. Do what feels comfortable and genuine in the moment, and don't force anything that doesn't fit. Making it fun doesn't hurt either.

My personality is more reserved. But for those who really want to get into it — and you know who you are — here are some ideas that might spark something. These are purely optional starting points, not a prescription:

- A fist pump, say Yes! and a word or phrase that means something to you
- Say Yes! Go [name of your favourite sports team]
- Whistle a few bars of a song that reliably lifts your mood
- One completely unnecessary dance move
- Say Yes! in your worst Australian accent
- A genuine self-high-five — it sounds odd, it works surprisingly well
- A movie quote that makes you smile every time you hear it
- A terrible Dad joke, delivered to no one, with full commitment
- Four bars of freestyle rap about absolutely nothing

KEY POINT *The YES! step works because it has to. Your Autopilot is looking for an immediate positive feeling — that's why it reaches for food. Give it that positive feeling through something else, and it starts reaching for that instead.*

The goal is a genuine, momentary positive shift. The more personal and authentic your version of that is, the more effective it tends to be — novelty and genuine emotion both amplify the dopamine response.¹⁰

I'll be honest: the first time I tried the YES! step I said it quietly under my breath in an empty room and it felt really awkward. My inner critic had a field day. But I did it again the next time. And the time after that. Somewhere around day four it stopped feeling ridiculous and started feeling — I don't know — slightly satisfying. That was the moment I knew something was actually happening.

I'd genuinely love to hear what you come up with.

What the full sequence looks like

You're sitting at your desk. Hard day. Deadline pressure. You notice the urge to get up and find something to eat even though you're not hungry.

Smile. You pause. You smile — real enough to feel it slightly in your eyes.

Acknowledge. "I'm stressed and my brain wants food to take the edge off. That's what's happening."

YES! You do your thing. Whatever it is. For a few seconds, you create a genuine positive shift — something that's entirely yours.

Then you get back to work.

The whole sequence takes just a few seconds. It doesn't eliminate the stress. It gives your Autopilot a genuine positive feeling — the thing it was actually looking for — without the food. Done consistently, your Autopilot starts to expect this sequence when stress hits. Over time, it reaches for this instead.

Enough theory — let's actually do this

Here's what's about to happen, and it's genuinely the fun part. In a moment you're going to stand up, grin like you mean it, and shout "YES!" with a fist pump.

And here's what I want you to know going in: this feels good. Your brain already knows how to do this — it does it for puppies, good news, and your favorite song coming on at exactly the right moment. We're just going to ask it directly, on purpose.

So here's your one job: **feel good**. Not perform three steps perfectly — feel good. Create a genuine burst of happiness, right now, and notice how easily you can switch it on whenever you want. Everything else is just the delivery.

Throw yourself into it and the good feeling follows fast. Ready? Here we go.

FEEL GOOD — DO IT RIGHT NOW — 5 SECONDS

- 1. Stand up** if you can — or stay seated, it works just as well.
- 2. Smile — a big one.** Feel your mouth widen and your cheeks lift. Let real happiness in.
- 3. Say "YES!" out loud and throw a fist pump.** Put real joy into it. Feel the spark land in your chest.

That's it. Now sit back down.

Feel that?

That lift — the spark in your chest, the lightness in your face, whatever showed up — that's the whole point. You just made yourself feel good in five seconds, deliberately, with a smile, a word, and a fist pump.

And it wasn't your imagination. A burst of movement and genuine positive expression measurably nudges your brain's feel-good chemistry — the exact chemistry your Autopilot goes hunting for when it marches you to the fridge.

Big rush or small flicker, it counts. The flicker is real, it's the same mechanism, and it gets stronger every single time you use it. Either way, you just proved the one thing this whole book rests on: *you can create the good feeling yourself*.

Now picture doing that the moment a craving hits, instead of opening the cupboard. That's the method. You just ran it — and it felt good, exactly like I said it would.

Yes, it's this simple. That's the whole point.

You just felt that. So here's why a part of you still doesn't quite believe it.

Right about now a reasonable part of you is objecting. Smile, say a word, do a small celebration — and *that's* supposed to fix something you've fought for years? It feels far too small for the size of the problem.

Here's what's actually happening, because it's worth understanding. When the urge hits and you do the YES!, you give your Autopilot the exact thing it was reaching for — an immediate positive feeling. It wanted a hit of relief, and you handed it one; it just didn't come from the fridge. Your Autopilot isn't fighting you here. It got what it demanded. It's satisfied.

So who's resisting? Your Thinker. The awkwardness, the "this is silly" voice, the self-consciousness — that's all coming from your conscious, rational brain, because the behavior is new and deliberate and doesn't feel natural yet. That isn't a sign it's not working. That's just what *new* feels like.

And that points to what actually matters, especially early on: doing it in the moments when the urge shows up. Not drilling it for its own sake — using it when it counts. Each time you do, you're showing your Autopilot a new way to get the thing it wanted.

That's where repetition comes in — not as the thing that does the work in any one moment, but as what turns the new response into a habit. The first times, your Thinker has to step in and run the play on purpose. Do it enough times, in enough real moments, and your Autopilot takes it over — it stops needing your conscious effort and starts reaching for the new thing on its own. That's your Thinker retraining your Autopilot. It's how you learn anything new: clumsy and deliberate at first, automatic later — the same way you once had to think about every step of driving a car and now don't think about it at all.

Which is why the simplicity isn't a weakness. It's the whole design. A complicated technique with seven steps and a journal is one you'll do twice and abandon. A technique simple enough to run in five seconds — at your desk, in the car, at the open fridge door — is one you'll actually use in the moments that count, often enough for the retraining to take. Simple is what makes it usable when it matters. Usable when it matters is the entire game.

So if it feels too easy to work, good. That's the feature, working as designed.

The awkward phase is real and normal

Fair warning: the first few times you do this, it may feel a little awkward, and you may feel self-conscious. Do it anyway — you already know where that awkwardness is coming from, and it isn't a sign anything's wrong.

Keep going, even imperfectly, even awkwardly. The feeling catches up to the action faster than you'd expect. Most people notice a shift within the first few days — not a dramatic transformation, just a moment where the celebration feels slightly less ridiculous and slightly more real. That's the signal your Autopilot is paying attention.

One important note on what this is not

This technique is not suppression. You're not pushing the feeling down, distracting yourself from it, or pretending it isn't there.

You're acknowledging the feeling — step two is literally named for this — and then giving your nervous system something genuine and positive to work with. The feeling gets seen. It just doesn't get to drive.

That distinction matters, both for how the method works and for how it feels to use it. Suppression is exhausting. This, done right, is the opposite.

Chapter 4: Using It In The Real Moments

When it counts

There's a particular kind of confidence that comes from reading about a method and thinking: yes, I can absolutely do that.

It is, unfortunately, a completely different kind of confidence from actually doing it when the moment arrives.

You can read Chapter 3 nodding along, feeling genuinely prepared. And then a hard day arrives, the feeling hits, and your carefully absorbed knowledge evaporates like it was never there. Turns out your Autopilot didn't read Chapter 3. It's been busy.

This chapter is about closing that gap. We're going to walk through the most common emotional eating scenarios — the specific moments where the urge tends to hit hardest — and apply the SAY YES! sequence to each one. Not abstractly. Concretely, so that when you're in that moment, you've already been there once in your head.

Think of it as a rehearsal. Athletes do this — they visualize the specific situations they'll face before they face them, so the response is already partially grooved when it matters. The same principle applies here.¹¹

The five moments

These aren't the only situations where emotional eating shows up. But they're the most common ones, and between them they cover the majority of patterns most people experience.

Moment 1: The Stress Spiral

What it looks like: Something has gone wrong, or a lot of things have gone slightly wrong simultaneously. Work pressure, a difficult conversation, a day that keeps piling on. You're not thinking clearly about food — you're just suddenly in the kitchen, or at the vending machine, or ordering something you didn't plan to order.

What's actually happening: Your Autopilot has activated a stress-relief program it knows well. The move toward food happened before your Thinker had much input.

SAY YES! in this moment:

Smile — Even under stress, even if it feels forced. Especially if it feels forced. You're sending your brain a signal that interrupts the automatic sequence.

Acknowledge — "I'm stressed. This is stress. My brain wants food to take the edge off and that's exactly what's happening right now."

YES! — Say "Yes" with a small fist pump. Or your version, whatever it is. For a few seconds, something genuine and positive.

That's it. You can take a moment to reflect. The stress may still be there. The method doesn't necessarily eliminate it. What it does is give your nervous system a real positive response that isn't food — and over repetitions, that response starts to satisfy the thing the stress was driving you toward.

The stress spiral was my one. Late evenings, pressure from the day still running in the background, not hungry but somehow standing in the kitchen anyway. Once I recognized it for what it was — not hunger, just my Autopilot doing its job — the whole thing lost some of its power. Not immediately. But gradually, reliably.

Moment 2: The Boredom Drift

What it looks like: Nothing is wrong. Nothing is particularly right either. You're not hungry. You're just restless. Understimulated. And somehow the kitchen seems interesting.

What's actually happening: Your brain is seeking stimulation and has defaulted to one of the easiest sources available. This is one of the most automatic forms of emotional eating because there's no obvious emotional trigger — just a low-level restlessness that's easy to miss.

SAY YES! in this moment:

Smile — This one often produces a small, wry smile anyway once you recognize what's happening. Use it.

Acknowledge — "I'm bored. I'm not hungry, I'm understimulated, and this is my brain looking for something to do."

YES! — This is a particularly good moment for something playful. The boredom itself is the thing you're interrupting, so a genuinely fun YES! does double work — it addresses both the automatic reach and the underlying restlessness.

Moment 3: The Late Night Pull

What it looks like: The day is winding down. You're tired. Your resistance is lower than it's been all day — which makes sense, because your Thinker has been working since morning and is running on fumes. The pull toward food is quieter than stress eating but remarkably consistent.

What's actually happening: By evening, your Thinker's capacity to override automatic responses is genuinely reduced. This isn't weakness — it's biology. Your Autopilot has more of the wheel late at night than it does at 9am.

SAY YES! in this moment:

Smile — Slow it down here. The tiredness makes everything feel more effortful, so give the smile a full two or three seconds.

Acknowledge — "I'm tired. It's late. My resistance is lower right now and that's why this feels harder. I'm not hungry."

YES! — Say "Yes!" A quiet internal version works fine here. The point is the genuine positive shift, not the performance.

Moment 4: The Social Pressure Moment

What it looks like: You're with other people. Food is present — at a celebration, a work event, a family dinner. Everyone around you is eating. The social pull to participate is strong, and saying no feels like it requires an explanation you don't want to give.

What's actually happening: Social conformity is a genuine behavioral driver — humans are wired to mirror the behavior of people around them, and food is one of the most socially loaded behaviors there is.¹² This isn't weakness, it's neuroscience.

SAY YES! in this moment:

This scenario requires some adaptation because you're not alone. The full sequence still works — it just runs internally rather than externally.

Smile — A natural social smile works perfectly here. Nobody around you knows what you're doing.

Acknowledge — Internal, quiet. "I feel the pull to eat because everyone around me is eating. That's what this is."

YES! — Internal positive shift. A quiet word to yourself. A small private moment of genuine satisfaction. No fist pump required — your situation gets to dictate your version.

Moment 5: The Habit Loop

What it looks like: You're doing a specific thing — watching TV, sitting at your desk, driving — and the reach for food is almost automatic. You're not stressed, not bored in a conscious way, not responding to social pressure. It just happens, the same way it always happens in this context.

What's actually happening: This is pure cue-dependent behavior.⁴ The context itself — the couch, the screen, the car — has become the trigger. The association has been repeated so many times that the behavior runs almost without input.

SAY YES! in this moment:

Habit loops are the most automatic of all the patterns, which means the Smile step is especially important here — it's the interruption that creates the gap the rest of the sequence needs.

Smile — This is your pattern interrupt. The physical shift in your face is what breaks the automatic sequence before it completes.

Acknowledge — "This is a habit. I always do this here. That's the only reason this is happening right now."

YES! — Say "Yes." Your version. Then notice that the habit didn't complete — and that's worth genuinely celebrating.

What to do when you've already eaten

This is important, because it will happen.

You'll miss the moment. The sequence won't occur to you until after. Or it will occur to you and you'll do it anyway, and it won't be enough, and you'll eat.

Here's what that means: nothing catastrophic. It means you're learning a new skill and you didn't nail it this time.

What you do not do is use it as evidence that the method doesn't work or that you can't do it. One missed moment is data, not verdict. The pattern took years to build. Replacing it takes repetitions, not perfection.

What you do instead: run the sequence after. Not as punishment — as practice.

Smile. Acknowledge what happened, without judgment: "I ate emotionally just now. That's what happened." YES! — genuinely, for being honest with yourself about it.

Then you move on. Completely. The moment is over and the next moment is a fresh start.

Research on self-compassion and behavior change consistently shows that people who respond to setbacks with self-compassion rather than self-criticism are more likely to maintain behavior change over time — not less.¹³ Letting yourself off the hook is not the soft option. It's the effective one.

KEY POINT *The sequence works in every scenario, but it adapts to each one. Internal or external, quiet or expressive, a few seconds or a few breaths — what stays constant is the genuine positive shift. That's the mechanism. Everything else is flexible.*

Chapter 5: Beyond The Method — What Makes It Stick

Why technique alone isn't enough

Good news: the method works.

Slightly less convenient news: the method working for two weeks and then quietly fading out is not the same as the method working.

Around week two or three — sometimes earlier, sometimes later — the novelty fades. The sequence stops feeling new. The small wins feel less exciting. And without something deeper underneath, that's often where people quietly stop — not dramatically, not with a conscious decision to quit, but with a gradual reduction in frequency that the Autopilot is very happy to fill with its older, more established habits.

This isn't a failure of the method. It's a motivation architecture problem. And the fix is straightforward: underneath the technique, you need a reason that actually matters to you. Not a vague aspiration. A specific, felt sense of what you're building toward and why it matters.

Researchers studying long-term behavior change consistently find that people who connect their behavioral goals to deeper personal values maintain those behaviors significantly longer than people motivated by external outcomes alone.¹⁴

In plain terms: "I want to feel better" runs out of gas. "I want to feel better because of this specific thing that genuinely matters to me" doesn't.

One thing that helps you keep going

The method works on its own. The three steps are the whole mechanism, and nothing in this chapter is required to make them work. But there's one thing worth adding — not to the method, but to your motivation for using it on the days the old pattern feels louder than usual.

Have a reason. A real one.

Not "lose weight" or "look better." Ask what you actually want to feel different — more energy, more presence with the people you care about, the quiet relief of not being at war with yourself — and then ask why that matters. The first answer is usually the surface one. The second answer, the one underneath, is usually the real one. That second answer is worth more at 9pm than any amount of willpower.

Make it vivid — a specific, felt picture beats an abstract goal, because your brain orients toward detail more powerfully than toward an idea.¹⁵

My own went through a few versions. The first was vague — something about energy. The one that stuck was simpler and more personal than I expected, and I'll let you find yours. Don't overthink it: it doesn't need to be a grand life purpose, and it's allowed to change as you do. Just write it down somewhere you'll see it.

If it helps, give it something physical to land on — a photo, an object, a word on a card you'll notice. When you see it, the reason comes back. That part's optional, but for some people it's the difference between a reason they remember and one they forget.

That's the whole support structure. One reason, written down, maybe pinned to something you can see. The method does the rest.

How the method evolves — and when it ends

Here's something worth saying clearly, because most behavior change books won't say it:

You will not be doing this consciously forever. And that's exactly what success looks like.

The SAY YES! sequence is a conscious practice in the beginning because it has to be. Your Autopilot needs the repetitions. The new pattern needs to be deliberately reinforced until it starts running on its own. But that process has a natural arc.

Phase 1 — Deliberate practice. You're running the full sequence consciously every time. It feels effortful, sometimes awkward. This is the learning phase. Do it anyway.

Phase 2 — Partial automation. The sequence is becoming more natural. You catch the moments earlier. Sometimes just recognizing what's happening is enough — the awareness itself interrupts the automatic reach.

Phase 3 — Integration. This is what success actually looks like. The pattern has genuinely shifted. You're aware of the moments when they come. You reach for the tools when you need them, and often you don't need them — because your Autopilot has learned a different default.

This isn't stopping. This is arriving.

And if life shifts — new stressors, new contexts, a difficult season — you come back to the deliberate practice for a while. Not because you failed. Because you have a tool and you're using it.

The goal was never to do SAY YES! every day for the rest of your life. The goal was to change an automatic pattern. When that's happened, the scaffolding comes down.

Adjusting before it breaks

Don't wait until the method stops working to adjust it.

If it's starting to feel mechanical — if the celebrations feel stale, if you're going through the motions without the genuine positive shift — change something. Change your YES! completely. Try a different version of the Acknowledge step. Scale back to just the Smile when the full sequence feels like too much.

Adjusting the method when it's still working, before it breaks, is smarter than pushing through rigidity and quitting when it stops feeling real. The core mechanism doesn't change — genuine positive emotional response, attached to a moment of awareness, repeated. How you create that response can evolve as many times as you need it to.

When it doesn't go smoothly

A few honest snags, and what to do about them.

You can't make yourself smile. Some moments are heavy enough that a smile won't come, and forcing a hollow one does little. Fine — drop it and go straight to the YES! Even a quiet, flat "yes" with a small gesture gives your Autopilot something. And if you genuinely can't do any of it right then, you still *caught* the moment — that awareness is the hard part, and it's already working. Run the sequence afterward instead.

It still feels fake after a couple of weeks. Early awkwardness is normal and fades. If it's still hollow well past that, the problem is usually the YES! itself — yours has gone stale. Change it completely. The version that worked in week one isn't required to work in week six.

You keep missing the moment entirely. Common early on, and not a failure — the urge is fast and your awareness is still catching up. Every time you notice, even after the fact, you're training it to arrive earlier. It does.

KEY POINT *The three steps are the method, and they work on their own. A reason that matters isn't part of the mechanism — it's just what gets you to use it on the hard days.*

Chapter 6: This Is Just The Beginning

Wherever you are right now is exactly right

Maybe you're reading this having just finished the book in one sitting, fired up and ready to start tomorrow. Maybe you're halfway through a rough week and this chapter is the first thing you've read in ten days. Maybe you tried the method, it worked for a while, life got complicated, and you're back here looking for a reset.

All of those are fine. All of those are, in their own way, evidence that you're doing this right — because you're still here.

Changing a deeply ingrained automatic pattern is hard in a specific way that doesn't always get acknowledged. It's not dramatic hard. It's quiet, repetitive, show-up-again-on-a-Tuesday hard. The kind that doesn't look impressive from the outside and doesn't feel like progress even when it is.

If you've tried the method even once, in even one moment, that counts. If you've caught yourself mid-reach and just paused — even if you ate anyway — that's the awareness working. The scoreboard looks different than you think it does.

What changes when you stop fighting yourself

There's something that shifts when you stop being at war with yourself over something you've struggled with for years. The energy that was going into that fight — the low-grade mental overhead of the guilt, the failed attempts, the self-negotiation — that energy goes somewhere else.

People report different things. More patience. Better sleep. The self-compassion they've been practicing here starts showing up in how they talk to themselves about other things entirely. None of that is guaranteed, and it's not the reason you came — but it's a common enough side effect to be worth mentioning.

The mechanism you've been building isn't just for emotional eating. It's a general-purpose tool for working with your own automatic responses. What you've learned here is worth considerably more than the specific problem it solved.

Come back whenever you need to

This book isn't a program you complete and shelve. It's a resource you own.

On the days when the old pattern feels louder — and those days will come — come back to Chapter 3. Run through the sequence. Read the scenario that feels relevant. You don't start over when you return. You pick up exactly where you are.

Conclusion: Your Move

A word on how this actually went for me, since I opened with a wetsuit that didn't fit and then left you hanging.

I was 198 pounds the day of the garage incident. In college I'd been 165. I got back to 165 fairly quickly — and the part I care about more, I've stayed between 163 and 168 for four years since. Today I'm 165. The wetsuit fits. I'm on the water most weeks.

Let me be straight about what did what, because you've trusted me this far and a tidy story would oversell it. The weight came off through some deliberate, unglamorous decisions I'd known about for years — fewer refined carbs, less sugar, smaller portions. None of it was new information. I'd known what to do the entire fifteen years I was slowly gaining it. Knowing had never been the problem.

The problem was the emotional eating that sabotaged every attempt before it got anywhere — the evening snacking, the automatic reach for chocolate, the eating that had nothing to do with hunger and everything to do with how the day had gone. That's the part willpower never fixed. That's the part the method fixed. SAY YES! didn't make me thinner. It removed the thing that had been quietly undoing every sensible decision I ever made about food — and once it was gone, the sensible decisions finally had somewhere to land.

This was never a diet, and I'm not prescribing one. The method is the tool that handles the emotional, automatic eating, so whatever else you decide to do actually holds.

Four years on, I use it maybe once a week. Not because I quit — because I mostly don't need it anymore. I know my triggers now. I can shift my own mood without running the full sequence most of the time. And when I do have the ice cream or the candy, I have it on purpose, enjoy it, and move on — no guilt, no spiral, because I'm the one deciding. That turned out to be the real prize. Not the number on the scale. The quiet confidence of carrying a tool that works, and knowing this part of my life is mine to run. It's just part of me now.

Three steps. A few seconds. Any situation.

That's it. That's the whole thing.

Everything in this book exists to support those three steps — the science that explains why they work, the scenarios that show you how to use them, the WHY that keeps you using them past the point where novelty fades. But the steps themselves are simple, and you have them now.

Start before you're ready. The first attempt will be imperfect. Good. By the tenth you'll have real data about what works for you specifically — which version of the YES! step actually produces a genuine shift, which moments are hardest, where the awareness tends to arrive too late.

When it works — own it. It worked because you showed up and did the thing. Not luck. You.

When it doesn't — one moment. That's all it is. The next one is already available.

Milo's Bull

Around 520 BC, a boy in the Greek city of Croton began carrying a newborn calf on his shoulders every day.

Not because he had a plan. Not because he could see where it was going. Just because he did it one day, and then the next, and the next.

The calf grew. So did he. The weight increased so gradually — a few ounces here, a fraction of a pound there — that on any given day it felt like roughly the same thing he'd done yesterday. Nothing dramatic. Nothing that looked like progress from the outside.

By the time the calf was a full-grown bull, Milo of Croton was carrying it across his shoulders without breaking stride. He went on to win six Olympic championships and become the most celebrated athlete of the ancient world.

The ancient writers who recorded this story weren't really writing about weightlifting. They were writing about the invisible accumulation of small, consistent effort — and the way transformation sneaks up on you when you're not watching for it.

Your repetitions are accumulating. Even the awkward ones. Even the ones that didn't feel like enough. Even on the days nothing seemed to change.

Success is often the cumulative result of lots of small actions. It just takes persistence.

You understand the mechanism. You know what your Autopilot responds to. You have a method that works with your brain instead of against it.

Now go have a conversation with it.

If this book helped you, a short review means more than you'd think.

It helps other people find it — people who are exactly where you were when you picked this up.

A Note On Getting Support

This book is a practical, common-sense behavioral approach designed for the everyday emotional eating patterns that most people experience at some point — eating in response to stress, boredom, anxiety, or habit.

It is not a clinical treatment, and it is not a substitute for professional support.

If your relationship with food feels like something beyond everyday emotional eating — if it involves restriction, purging, feeling genuinely out of control around food, or significant distress that affects your daily life — please consider reaching out to a qualified professional. A doctor, therapist, or eating disorder specialist is the right starting point, not this book.

If you're in the US and looking for support, the National Alliance for Eating Disorders helpline is a good first call: 1-866-662-1235.

The right tool for the right situation. That's all.

Quick Reference: SAY YES! In The Moment

The three steps

S — Smile

Real enough to feel it. Two or three seconds. You're sending your brain a signal.

A — Acknowledge

Recognize what's actually happening. Out loud or silently.

"I'm stressed. I'm bored. I'm anxious. This is a habit. That's what this is."

Y — YES!

Say "Yes!" — with a fist pump, or your version of it. Something genuine. A few seconds of real positive feeling. That's the whole mechanism.

The five moments

Moment	Acknowledge it as...
Stress eating	<i>"I'm stressed and my brain wants food to take the edge off."</i>
Boredom eating	<i>"I'm not hungry. I'm understimulated and looking for something to do."</i>
Late night pull	<i>"I'm tired. My resistance is lower right now. That's what this is."</i>
Social pressure	<i>"I feel the pull because everyone around me is eating."</i>
Habit loop	<i>"This is a habit. The context is the trigger, not hunger."</i>

When you miss the moment

Run the sequence after. Not as punishment — as practice. Acknowledge what happened without judgment. YES! for being honest with yourself. Then move on completely.

When the method starts feeling mechanical

Change something. Try a different YES! Adjust the Acknowledge. Scale back to just the Smile. Adapt before it breaks.

When you feel like you don't need it anymore

You probably don't. That's what success looks like. The tool is still yours — pick it back up whenever a moment calls for it.

Success is often the cumulative result of lots of small actions. It just takes persistence.

Want the one-page version?

The whole method fits on a single page — the three steps, the five moments, all of it — built to print out or keep on your phone for the moments you need it fast. It's the same Quick Reference you just read, in a form you can actually carry. It's yours, free.

Grab it here: **www.EastbournPress.com/guide**

You'll also get a short run of practical follow-up emails over the next few weeks — real-world tips for putting the method to work in the moments that matter. No ongoing newsletter, no spam — just a bit of useful follow-through, and you can stop any time.

And if you invent a YES! that genuinely surprises you — something that isn't on any list — I'd love to hear it. The best versions of this method are the ones I haven't thought of yet.

About The Author



James Goldney has spent his career studying why people make the decisions they do — first professionally, across three decades in marketing and business, and eventually for more personal reasons, when he had to solve his own emotional eating to get back into a wetsuit that no longer fit.

He is not a doctor or a psychologist, and this book doesn't pretend otherwise. What he is: someone with a technical, science-leaning background who'd rather read the primary research than take someone else's word for it, and who keeps circling one question — why do people keep doing things they've already decided to stop doing? The answer has little to do with weakness and everything to do with the automatic patterns running underneath conscious thought, which turn out to be remarkably resistant to logic, willpower, and good intentions.

This is his second book. The first — *Whiff!: The Revolution of Scent Communication in the Information Age* (Quimby Press) — explored how scent shapes human behavior and perception. *Stop Emotional Eating* turns the same interest in behavioral science toward a problem millions of people fight in their own kitchens, and the practical tools that actually change it.

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