

Beyond Diet Culture

Rethinking Food, Stress, and Wellbeing at Work

Joanna Zelichowska, MA, RCC | www.joannazelichowska.com

KEY CONCEPTS

Food as the Most Permissible Break

In the workplace, eating is often the only break that needs no justification. It's a pleasurable, sensory experience that is easily accessible and comforting. Subtle internal or external blocks may be getting in the way of expanding our repertoire of other ways to find rest and regulate ourselves.

Emotional Eating — Reframed

Emotional eating is not pathological by nature. Food has always meant security, safety, love, celebration, and community. The intersection of feelings and food is deeply human, not a failure that requires optimization.

It becomes worth examining when there is overreliance on food as the primary coping strategy. The workplace environment can play a role in supporting a broader application of wellness practices or reinforce unhelpful habits.

Distraction, Attention, and Satisfaction

When we eat in a distracted state, particularly in the presence of screens, our ability to be present to our body's signals is significantly diminished. This affects our capacity to discern flavor, experience enjoyment, and our awareness of satisfaction and satiety.

Distraction also pulls us away from our inner experience, making it harder to identify what we are feeling and thus limiting our ability to tend to our needs.

Emotional Granularity

Vague emotional labels produce vague responses. The more precisely we can name what we feel, the more precisely we can identify what we actually need and take one action toward it.

Awareness → Specificity → Congruent Action

PRACTICAL TOOLS

The Curious Eating Audit

Bring these questions to your next meal — not as rules, but as self-inquiry:

- What is the context I'm eating in right now?
- Am I distracted? How many sources of stimulus do I have going?
- What information do I have about how I'm feeling right now?
- Can I name it with more specificity than 'stressed' or 'tired'?
- Is there something I can do that would address what I'm feeling?

Your Personal Sensory Menu

Build in advance and tailor it to your setting:

- **Low effort (under 2 min, anywhere):** deep breaths, stretching, cold water on face/hands, step away from screen, look out a window
- **Medium effort (5–10 min):** step outside, short walk, non-work conversation, message someone you love, doodle, gratitude list
- **Higher effort (30–60 min):** a proper away-from-desk meal with presence and no screen, movement or exercise, a hobby or creative activity

THE THROUGH LINE

This isn't about eating less, eating better, or achieving a new standard of wellness. It's about permission to rest, feel, articulate our needs, and to have a more curious and reflective relationship with our experience. The most useful thing we can do for our wellness and those in our care is to cultivate a more expansive and compassionate way of tending to our needs.

HOLDING COMPLEXITY — MOVING BEYOND BINARIES

NOT THIS		BUT THIS
<i>A new set of wellness rules</i>	→	Discernment over prescription, and curiosity over judgment
<i>Wellness programs as neutral or helpful</i>	→	Recognizing when wellness culture repackages diet culture with friendlier language
<i>Weight as the primary health indicator</i>	→	Decoupling weight from worth — shifting focus from outcomes to behaviours, habits, and how we feel
<i>Eliminating emotional eating</i>	→	Understanding its purpose and exploring additional tools that could meet those needs more precisely
<i>Judging food choices or behaviors</i>	→	Getting curious about the conditions and environment around eating
<i>Avoiding food celebrations or traditions</i>	→	Honoring food's cultural and relational meaning while expanding the toolkit
<i>Achieving a 'perfect' mindful eating practice</i>	→	A slightly less automatic, slightly more aware relationship with a daily experience

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