

# Research links impulsivity and binge eating

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Kelly Klump, MSU Foundation Professor of Psychology, researches the biological, psychological and cultural factors behind eating disorders. Credit: G.L. Kohuth

Do you get impulsive when you're upset? If so, this could be putting you at risk for binge eating.

According to Kelly Klump, professor of psychology at Michigan State University and senior author, the more impulsive you are, the more likely it is you'll binge eat when experiencing [negative feelings](#).

"It's [human nature](#) to want to turn to something for comfort after a bad day, but what our research found is that the tendency to act rashly when faced with [negative emotions](#) is a [personality trait](#) that can lead to binge eating," Klump said.

Binge eating—the uncontrollable consumption of a large amount of [food](#) in a short period of time—doesn't just happen because someone's had a rotten day, it's tied to how impulsive you are.

Klump and her team interviewed 612 female twins, of which 14 percent had binge eating, overeating (consumption of a large amount of food without a loss of control) or loss of control over eating (difficulty controlling one's consumption of even a small amount of food). They determined that

people with these eating problems generally had higher levels of 'negative urgency,' or a tendency to act impulsively when experiencing negative emotions, than those who did not have pathological eating.

What's more, it's not just those with binge eating who act impulsively when upset. "Both overeating and feeling out of control when eating small or normal amounts of food were related to rash action when experiencing negative emotions," said Sarah Racine, assistant professor of psychology at Ohio University and lead author on the research.

Although negative urgency was high in those people who set out to overeat and those who lose control when eating, Racine believes there may be different factors at play for these two types of problem eating.

"It is possible that relationships between [binge eating](#) and negative urgency reflect impairments in behavioral control over eating when upset," said Racine. "Overeating may instead represent increased sensitivity to rewarding effects of food in the context of negative emotions."

This research has important implications for treatment, Klump said. "If we can treat the underlying tendency to jump to eating when feeling negative emotions like stress, we may be able to help thousands of individuals who suffer from a range of eating disorders."

**More information:** The paper, "Examining Associations Between Negative Urgency and Key Components of Objective Binge Episodes," was published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*. [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.../eat.22412/abstract](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.../eat.22412/abstract)

Provided by Michigan State University

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