



## Recovering from an Emotional Cold

A few years ago, I got a terrible cold. It started when I fell off the sidewalk. I didn't notice that I was close to the edge, my weak ankle twisted, and I slammed my knee down hard on the cement. "You're very lucky," the doctor said. "No torn ligaments or broken bones. Just a big bruise."

I was grateful it wasn't a serious injury. But besides the fact that it hurt a lot, that bruise made me feel old and grumpy. It also pushed me over the fragile edge of my mental stamina and into an emotional slump. I knew that it wasn't a deep depression, certainly not the kind that requires therapy or drugs. It was just an "emotional cold."

When this happens to me, I want to eat everything. I especially want to eat carrot cake, ice cream and huge chocolate-chip cookies. Of course, these foods only treat the symptoms, not the problem. An hour later, my emotional cold is still there, dragging me down more than ever.

### How it gets started

An emotional cold can be brought on by any number of stressful things. Sometimes it's a struggling relationship, a job layoff, or just being overwhelmed or sick of life at the moment. In some cases, unusual work demands or an ill parent can wear us out.

Emotional challenges tend to be cumulative, just like physical problems. In my case, I'd been through many weeks of subtle stress related to my writing, website development and work concerns.

I'd been struggling with feeling a little moody, discouraged and slightly depressed. And I think all of these things simply kept adding up until I (literally) lost my balance.

### Treating an emotional cold

From my own experiences as well as my years of weight-loss counseling, here are some things I've learned about healing from an emotional cold.

#### 1. It's a real cold

Recognize and acknowledge it when you get an emotional cold. Give up the fake happy face and admit that you're feeling down. When you get an emotional cold, you can't just talk yourself out of it, ignore it or shake it off. You may have to snuggle under an emotional blanket for a few days, and give yourself time to get better.

#### 2. It's not your fault

Even if you realize it's related to stress or not taking time for yourself, don't blame yourself for getting an emotional cold. They just show up, often as a way to remind us that it's time to slow down and take better care of ourselves.

And if you eat sweets or junk food in your efforts to cope with your cold, don't conclude that you're weak or a failure. You probably just needed some relief from the symptoms while you waited for life to heal you.

#### 3. Rest until you feel better

Do lots of nurturing and self-care while you allow yourself time to recover. If possible, eliminate some of your stress or look for ways to decrease the demands in your life. Take some emotional time off. Call in sick (because you have a "bad cold") or ask your family to help out more for a few days because of your "illness."

Once you've recovered and you're feeling better, renew your determination for healthy eating and exercise. Pull out your list of non-food ways to nurture and reward yourself. Then lift the burden off your shoulders, stand up tall, and move back to the center of your healthy road.

Everyone gets an emotional cold now and then. If you learn to recognize the symptoms, then start treating it right away, you'll perk back up and recover a lot faster. Eventually, you may even learn how to prevent them and avoid experiencing the "last straw" such as falling off a sidewalk.