

MENTAL HEALTH TOOLS FOR WEIGHT LOSS

1. Addressing Stress

A key influencer in addressing weight loss and maintaining weight loss success is reducing and appropriately coping with stressors that are faced daily. The stress that people face has been shown to cause physical, behavioral, and psychological harm i.e. headaches, constipation, smoking, alcohol abuse, poor diet, sleep disturbances and obesity. Under stress people display a behavioral shift to a more westernized dietary pattern i.e. emotional overeating, overconsumption of high-fat, -salt, -sugar foods and less intake of fruits and vegetables.

Addressing daily stressors in healthy ways is critical, as well as further processing past trauma that can be contributing to current coping avenues. Within addressing each of these areas, comprehensive stress management programs can help individuals who are overweight significantly reduce perceived stress and depression and adopt healthier dietary patterns.

Additionally, incorporating practices of utilizing a "food and mood" journal can more specifically help in identifying how eating is related to stress and other emotions that individuals are experiencing. This exercise can help increase awareness, highlight emotional triggers to eating, and identify areas that may be beneficial to further explore and process **in** working towards weight loss goals.

Within the mental health approach, reducing physical symptoms of stress is focused on and can include using diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, guided visualization, and relaxation resources.

2. Mindful Eating and Intuitive Eating

a. Mindful Eating

Mindful eating, which influences awareness when eating, and focusing on internal self-talk related to body image, weight, and eating habits can also be essential in helping reduce stress and enhance progress in attaining weight loss goals. When using mindful eating practices, consider the following suggested tips:

1. Turn Off or Silence Your Devices Even when eating from home, this can help minimize distractions. Take the time to relax and enjoy your food without all the interruptions.

2. Take a Moment to Clear Your Head Appreciate the food that's in front of you. It takes a lot to prepare and produce the food you're about to eat.

3. Use Your Senses Mindful eating involves all 5 senses, so take note of the appearance, aroma, textures, flavors, and sounds of your food.

4. Name the Flavors As you eat your meal or snack, consider the 5 basic tastes and which you are experiencing. The 5 basic tastes are umami, bitter, sweet, salty, and sour. Sometimes foods contain more than one - can you tell the difference?

5. Notice the Texture Is the bite crunchy or creamy? Is it dry or moist? Paying attention to the texture of each bite you take may help make your eating experience more intentional.

6. Set Down the Fork In between bites, place your utensils down on your plate to help slow your pace. Mindful eating is an experience, not a race!

b. Intuitive Eating

Intuitive eating focuses on honoring hunger cues and using the mantra of "all foods fit". It approaches food relationships with a balance of honoring food choices with also being kind to ourselves if we overeat or partake in indulgent foods.

Using hunger scales is one way to be more aware of hunger in utilizing intuitive eating techniques. Before eating, rate your hunger on a scale of one (extremely hungry) to ten (overfull). Check in with yourself mid-meal and rate it again. If you are around a 6 (satisfied), consider saving the rest for later. The more we get "in tune" with our hunger cues, the better we become at choosing foods that are both nourishing and satisfying.

The Hunger & Fullness Scale



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3. Thought Patterns

"All or nothing thinking" or "black and white thinking" patterns are often involved in thinking approaches while trying to reach dietary goals. Examples of these would include "I'll never eat sweets again" or "from here on out, I'm only eating vegetables". Often, these thought patterns are not realistic or sustainable, and when these statements are not followed, judgement and self-hatred can increase and hinder long-term success. Research shows that you're more likely to reach set goals when you can challenge all-or-nothing thinking and reverse negative, self-destructive thoughts.

Ways to limit all or nothing thinking patterns and behaviors include allowing for gray space, identifying negative self-talk, and replacing negative self-talk with true and more realistic statements. Allowing for gray space, limits the expectation for perfection and recognizes that new habits don't have to be perfect, just manageable. When slip ups in dietary plans happen, which is a realistic possibility, self-talk is also crucial in how the remainder of the diet plan will go. Self-talk such as "I'm such a failure, I should just give up now" or "I'll never get this" can be significantly detrimental. Replacing these with statements such as "One sweet with not completely derail my efforts, I got this" or "I have overcome challenges and proven to be successful before, I can do this with balance and consistency" will help in moving forward with dietary goals and increasing self-compassion.

4. SMART Goals

Any goal, when related to weight loss, changing eating patterns, or anything outside of this, can be best reached when the approach used in working towards the goal is broken down into healthy steps. The SMART model can help with this and is shown in the following diagram:



Applying this model to weight loss goals and incorporating a visual of goals that you can see daily will help in maintaining focus on goals and seeing a rational breakdown of how to achieve them.

5. Staying on Track with the Basics

Mental health, reducing stress, and reaching dietary goals can be heavily influenced by maintaining the basics, including getting adequate rest, having daily structure and routine, exercising, and maintaining

healthy relationships and support systems. Although these seem basic, maintaining healthy practice in each of these areas can significantly increase success in reaching a variety of goals while maintaining healthy mental health functioning. Through keeping these areas consistent in day to day practice, thinking patterns are also often more rational and help in reaching goals.

Resources

[Impact of a stress management program on weight loss, mental health and lifestyle in adults with obesity: a randomized controlled trial.](#) Niovi Xenaki, Flora Bacopoulou, Alexandras Kollias, Nicolas C.

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