

## Weight-loss through Cognitive Therapy

Often, individuals become obsessive with the weight-loss pattern. Weight-loss and weight maintenance can become a ritualistic, compulsive cycle. Charlie Whitfield, author and addictions expert calls the pattern the "repetition cycle." Anxiety and depression mount, followed by the urge to eat, leading to self-indulgence, and ending with symptoms of self-blame and guilt. Then the cycle of abuse repeats itself. Paradoxically, those who follow an addictive quest to lose weight may actually end up sabotaging their own goals. Self-defeating thinking and behavior tend to perpetuate the cycle of unhealthy eating. No amount of exercise or nutritional support will address the need for individuals to learn to rationally respond to their maladaptive eating patterns. Unhealthy eaters are typically overwhelmed by self-blame. A downward spiral is set in motion by the way in which the person views himself. Unhealthy eaters will label themselves as being "fat" (whether they are or not), and will chastise themselves for not making progress in losing weight. Viewing oneself as an "overweight louse" is not an effective motivator for change. In fact, browbeating oneself for being less than perfect only intensifies the cycle of unhealthy eating abuse. Self-blame is a form of tyranny which keeps one stuck in the midst of the problem. Most unhealthy eaters experience thwarted anger. Rather than direct their resentment at the source of their difficulties, they self-sabotage by internalizing their anger and directing it toward themselves through unhealthy eating. They may feel frustrated by the conditional nature of a relationship, may have a family member who humiliated them about their weight, or experienced rejection through social betrayal. As confidence was stripped away, they developed a negative concept of self which fueled their unhealthy eating pattern. The self-blaming message is usually, "I guess I really am a slob, so the best I can do is to continue to prove it to myself." Unhealthy eaters can untwist their maladaptive thinking and meet their weight goals by:

- Learning to rationally respond to negative thinking. For example, instead of saying, "I'll never meet my weight goals, I'm just worthless," one might say, "Just relax and be patient, Rome wasn't built in a day."
- Identify cognitive distortions such as catastrophizing, labeling, personalizing, and black and white thinking. An example might be, "If I can't lose 5 lbs. this week I might as well give up" (black/white thinking).
- Instead of being unkind to yourself, talk to yourself the same compassionate way you would to a dear friend who is experiencing the same weight problem.
- Instead of assuming your negative thoughts are accurate, examine the evidence that supports your conclusions. "If I don't lose 15 lbs., will people really think I am hopelessly obese?"
- Instead of taking full responsibility for your weight problem, you can assess the many factors that may have contributed to it and address those issues with the support of others.
- Set a realistic agenda. Ask yourself, "What would it be worth to me to stop my unhealthy eating? How hard am I willing to work on a rational solution?"
- Evaluate weight maintenance progress based upon the process – the effort you put in – rather than the outcome. Your efforts are within your control, but the outcome may not.
- Substitute language that is less emotionally loaded. "I shouldn't have eaten that extra helping" can be redefined as, "It would have been preferable if I hadn't eaten more."

Often, people will expose themselves to a diet that will dramatically assist them in losing excessive weight only to have the weight return. Instead of "quick fix" diets, setting a realistic agenda for weight-loss is a more rational, thoughtful approach. A slow, gradual loss of weight helps us to more easily adjust to the psychological ramifications of body perception change. Weight-loss goals need to be established because we prefer the change, not because others want it for us. Feeling coerced to change, or sensing that others acceptance of us is conditional upon weight-loss will lead to resentment and a feeling of helplessness in our quest to change. Instead, we must vow to learn the difference between self-indulgence and self-respect and work to put self-kindness into our everyday experience and choose our relationships based upon these positive qualities. Weight loss is about majoring in the majors. It's not about how you butter your bread. It's about feeling good, getting out of self-blame, planning goals, changing one's life style, setting personal boundaries and getting involved. People who are unhappy with their life are more likely to self-indulge, to be compulsive and obsessive, and carry out other self-defeating behaviors as a means to ward off psychic pain. Making the courageous efforts to lose weight calls for a radical transformation in one's thinking. Because we are humans, we may all relapse, but the changes we make in our life can be imbedded in a new life style when we give our selves personal permission to change. There are no secrets to losing weight. It would be nice if there were a quick fix. We wish it and it is so! But like almost all struggles in life, this, too, takes hard work and commitment. From childhood, we are conditioned to believe that the only way we can change is when we are coerced. Therefore, we learn to mistrust our instincts and believe that if we give ourselves enough rope, we'll hang ourselves. Without exploring the psychological issues that may be triggering weight problems, most people will be doomed to repeat a pattern of self-defeating behavior. We must understand that we are more than the pleasure center of our brain. We are much more than the darkest side of our soul. Many may say that if I am not intolerant of my mistakes, how will I learn to motivate myself to change? However, real change only occurs when we learn to respect and value who we are with all of our faults.

## About the Author

Stop all smoking when beginning the nicotine gum therapy. The goal in using nicotine replacement therapy is to stop smoking.

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