

Fine-Tune your New Skills

Congratulations on reaching this point of your weight loss programme. You have come a long way! Now you know what to do when you want to eat but you know you shouldn't. You have demonstrated over and over that you can take control of your eating. You can decide what's in your best interest to eat – and not eat – and how to get yourself to follow through with your food plans, even if you are hungry, craving, seeking comfort, being pressured to eat, or just tempted by food.

This week, you will continue to fine-tune your Cognitive Therapy skills. You will learn how to continue to build your confidence by recognising that you have lost weight due to your own efforts, using the new behavioural and mindset techniques you have acquired. You will also learn how to reduce your overall stress so that you can continue to have time and energy for dieting. You will learn what to do when your weight plateaus and how to keep up with exercise. You will take steps towards enriching your life now – instead of waiting until you lose all the weight.

Finally, you will develop a reminder system that will help you continue to use your strategies for a very long time. You will improve your confidence, decrease stress, and enrich your life, so you will reduce your risk of relapse and increase your chances of lasting success.

To help change her perception of herself from someone who can't lose weight to someone who can lose weight, Paula read the Response Card below every day for weeks. Use it for inspiration in creating your own card.

BELIEVE IT!

I'm losing weight because I have learned how. I now know:

1. What I have to do (e.g. plan my eating, eat slowly while sitting down, use anti-craving strategies)
2. What I have to remind myself (e.g. hunger and cravings are never emergencies, NO CHOICE, Oh, well)
3. How to motivate myself (get support, read my Advantages Response Card, give myself credit every day)
4. How to keep honest (e.g when I'm on maintenance, I will report my weight change to my coach weekly)

Remind yourself what you were like, before you started this program. If that is hard to do, picture yourself during a holiday or special event that occurred around that time. In particular, take a look at the changes in your behaviour. Before you started this program:

- How often did you eat standing up?
- How often did you eat mindlessly?
- How often did you eat too quickly?
- How often did you plan ahead of time what you were going to eat?
- How often did you overeat or eat for emotional reasons?
- How often did you criticise yourself (and become demoralised) for what you ate?

How often do you do these things anymore?

Now, take a look at the changes in your thinking. Before you started this program:-

- How often did you fool yourself? *(It won't matter if I overeat once. Calories don't count if I eat crumbs. I can't have a good time if I don't eat what I want. It's okay to eat this because I'm upset. I've strayed, so I may as well blow it for the day.)*
- How often did you dwell on injustice? *(It's not fair that I can't eat like other people. It's not fair that I can't eat whatever I want. It's not fair that I have to diet.)*
- How often did you let your concerns about other people stand in the way of doing what you needed to do for yourself? *(I can't inconvenience others. I have to keep them happy. I can't turn down food they offer me.)*

How often do you have these kinds of thoughts now and how do you respond to them when they do arise?

It's important to continually take stock of what you have learned and the progress you have made. You need to recognise that you have lost weight because of your own efforts. You can continue to make this happen. Reinforce this idea by writing in your diet notebook exactly how you are different, as Leanne did.

Below is what Leanne wrote in her diet notebook to remind herself of how far she had come. She added to this list over time. Whenever she had a crisis of confidence, she would read it over to remind herself just how much she had changed.

Before I started this program, I couldn't consistently:-

- ✓ Leave food on my plate.
- ✓ Feel hungry and not stress about it.
- ✓ Say to myself, NO CHOICE.
- ✓ Stop eating when I had finished what was on my plate.
- ✓ Make exercise a priority.
- ✓ Stick to my plan.
- ✓ Refrain from spontaneous eating.
- ✓ Stop myself from nibbling at my dinner plate on the way to the table.
- ✓ Eat slowly.
- ✓ Eat sitting down.
- ✓ Recognise and respond to my sabotaging thoughts.
- ✓ Give myself credit.
- ✓ Limit myself when I ate out.
- ✓ Be assertive with food pushers.
- ✓ Put myself first so I could eat properly.

Reduce Stress

Everyone experiences some type of stress every day. In fact, mild stress can actually be helpful if it motivates you to be productive. But moderate to high levels of stress are counterproductive. Even if you are not under much stress today, you will be sooner or later, so prepare yourself now.

Three Steps to Lower your Level of Stress

You have learned how to cope with negative emotions and to solve problems that cause them. You will use many of the same skills to cope with problems that create stress. Here are the steps you should take.

Step 1: Solve the Problem

If you are stressed because you have too many demands or responsibilities, use your My Priority Chart and divide your activities into essential, highly desirable, and desirable categories. Use the Seven Question Technique to respond to negative thoughts that interfere with problem solving. You might also find it helpful to ask a friend or your weight loss coach for help.

Step 2: Relax

Chronic stress can make your body tense. Practice mindful relaxation or meditation. Consider getting a CD or download that teaches relaxation techniques, such as progressive muscle relaxation or guided imagery. Slow, controlled breathing, which was discussed earlier should also help.

Step 3: Change your Mindset

Many people are chronically stressed because they allow unreasonable rules to guide their behaviour. These rules usually have the word ***should or shouldn't*** in them. Do any of the following sound familiar?

- I should always do my best.
- I should always prevent problems from happening.
- I shouldn't rely on others
- I shouldn't let people down
- I shouldn't make others unhappy.

Lily, for example, has a rule: I should always put other people first. Therefore, even though it was the busiest time of the year at work, she agreed to help her mother buy a new computer, go with a friend to a concert, and help her cousin with gardening.

Martin has an unspoken rule: I can't show any sign of weakness. Therefore, he didn't take time off work when he had the flu (so it took him longer to recover.)

Susan also has a rule: I should do everything myself. Therefore, she deprived herself of the assistance she needed when her husband's chronic illness took a turn for the worse.

To reduce stress, you have to change your rules. Here is how to:-

Identify the rules you have for yourself. Your “should” and “shouldn’ts” will probably show up when you try to do problem solving, and you will exclude reasonable solutions if your rules are too rigid.

Example. Gemma was stressed at work. She knew the logical solution was to delegate some responsibilities. When she thought of doing so though, her rule surfaced: I shouldn’t let others do anything important because they might screw it up.

Example Lorraine was stressed from being home with two toddlers. She needed time for herself, but her rule – I shouldn’t ask others for help – interfered.

Relax your self-imposed rules. Use these suggestions to change them:-

- Think of someone with more relaxed standards. What rules does he/she go by?
- Consider whether you would want your loved ones to live by a particular rule. Can you see how it would lead to stress? What rule would you rather they have for themselves?
- Think of the advantages of changing your rules.
- Take the words “***always***” and “***never***” out of your rules:

I should *always* do my best, becomes, I should try to do a reasonable job most of the time.

I should *always* prevent problems from happening, becomes, I should try to take reasonable precautions.

I *shouldn’t ever* rely on others, becomes, I should rely on others when it is reasonable to do so.

Relax your rules for others. You will also be stressed if you have unreasonable expectations of other people. Do you believe:

- Other people should always be perfect?
- Other people should be able to read your mind?
- Other people should always be grateful?
- Other people shouldn’t make you unhappy?
- Other people shouldn’t treat you unfairly?
- Other people shouldn’t misunderstand you?

Jennie for example, was annoyed with customers who complained to her about the quality of her company's service: They shouldn't take it out on me! John was resentful that his neighbours didn't reach out to him: they should be nicer. Jane was worried because she thought others were too irresponsible: They should be much more careful.

Your **"should's" and "shouldn't's"** show up when you have unrealistic rules about the way other people behave. When Tim was annoyed with his teenagers, he looked at his rules for them: They should be more appreciative. They should help around the house more. Helen was unhappy with her family because of her rule: People should give back to me as much as I give to them.

To relax your rules for other people, do the following:-

- Recognise that you just don't have control – or not much control – over other people. The only one you really have control over is yourself. You can change your own thinking and behaviour, but you can't necessarily change other people.
- Think about someone you admire who has more relaxed ideas about how others should be. What rules does he/she have?
- Think of the advantages of changing your rules.
- Try to take the words ***always*** and ***never*** out of your rules.
- Change ***"should"*** or ***"shouldn't"*** to ***"It's realistic to expect that..."***
 - Other people should always be perfect, becomes, It's realistic to expect that other people will make mistakes.
 - Other people should always read my mind, becomes, It's realistic to expect that people won't know what I want or need unless I tell them.
 - Other people should always be grateful, becomes, It's realistic to expect that not everyone will be as appreciative as I would like them to be.

What are you thinking?

Sabotaging Thought: I've had these rules forever. How can I change them?

Helpful Response: I now have the skills to analyse my rules and ideas differently. I can also decide what is reasonable to do on a case-by-case basis.

Sabotaging Thought: If I lower my expectations for myself, I will become completely unmotivated.

Helpful Response: It is not all or nothing. I don't have to lower my expectations completely, just enough to reduce my stress.