



Overcoming Disordered Eating

Information Pack B

In Charge...Mindsets Matter

Module 8

Changing Mindsets

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This is the eighth module of Information Pack B, which provides information and strategies to help you start changing the *thoughts* associated with your disordered eating and weight control habits. We recommend that you do not proceed with this Information Pack unless you have worked through Information Pack A, which offers strategies to change your disordered *behaviours*. We also recommend that you work through all the modules in this Information Pack in order.

If you do think you might suffer from an eating disorder, it is important that you talk to your General Practitioner, as there are many physical complications that can arise from being at an unhealthy low weight or from losing weight very quickly, or from purging. We advise you to seek professional help with working on an eating disorder.

If you use any extreme weight control behaviours – even rarely – you should also see your General Practitioner for a full medical check-up, as your health might be compromised. Such extreme measures include:

- extreme food restriction/fasting (and/or rapid weight loss)
- purging (self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives or diuretics)
- extreme exercise

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Introduction

In this module we continue in our efforts to challenge thought patterns through ‘metacognitive awareness’, or taking a ‘helicopter view’. In the previous module we described mindsets and explored how mindsets develop. In this module we will discuss how to begin to change them and learn how to turn off or eject the ‘eating disorder DVD’.

You may already be noticing moments, or even days, when your eating disorder DVD isn’t playing. You are probably finding that at these times you are able to focus on what you are doing, without the constant preoccupation about eating, shape and weight. What a relief! Jot down some thoughts about how it feels at those times to be free of the eating disorder mindset.

In the previous module we helped you become more aware of your unhelpful attitudes and thoughts about eating, body shape and weight, and their control. Now it is time to begin to address them and tackle the eating disorder mindset, when it pops back into your mind. This can be done in two ways: 1) challenging the mindset, and 2) ejecting it (just like ejecting the DVD). Let’s consider challenging the mindset first.

Challenging the Eating Disorder Mindset

Acceptance and Change

One way to influence the eating disorder mindset is utilising the twin notions of acceptance and change. You may be asking yourself: “How could I possibly accept my weight when I’m so unhappy with it the way it is?” Let’s look at an example.

Tom is 170 cm tall. He would love to be 190 cm, like his friend Mark. In his teens, Tom kept hoping he would grow, and he was miserable. Finally he realised that both his father and his uncle were short, and that it was unlikely he would end up tall, and that being miserable didn’t help. So he learned to accept that he would always be short, and learned what clothes looked best on short men.

Perhaps you’re saying: “Well, weight isn’t like height, because you CAN change your weight!” Let’s look at another example:

Cathy has fine, straight hair. She has always wanted to have bushy, curly hair like her favourite singer. Over the years she has spent a fortune on curling irons, perms and hair-thickening products. For a while (sometimes minutes, sometimes weeks) her hair would look curly and she felt great, but then it would return to its normal state, so she had to make all the efforts again in order to keep up the appearance of having curly hair (which even her boyfriend believed was natural). So after a few years, she learned to accept that she would only be able to “fake” having curly hair for a rather short period, and at great cost. She decided to have her hair cut in a way that enhanced her fine hair, and found that she could accept it and that there were certain benefits, such as being able to wear big earrings.

You can only change your hair and your weight for a short time. Some people on diets do lose weight – but only in the short term. It is easy to believe that you can change your body into the shape/weight you desire, but this is a fallacy. If you are above or below the weight range that is healthy for you, it is likely that learning to eat healthily will put you back into a range that is healthy for you, If you are already in the average/healthy weight range for you, and eating healthily, it is unlikely that any major weight loss will be sustainable.



Overcoming Disordered Eating



Weight loss is temporary, like holding your breath. It takes a superhuman effort to lose weight, and 90-95% of people eventually put the weight back on. More than 60% of people with Anorexia Nervosa end up binge eating! Is it really worth the effort, when you know it can't last?

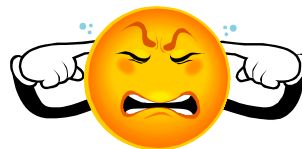


It has been suggested that the human body has a weight range that it is genetically predisposed to maintain. This is different for everyone – even people of the same height. The body uses regulatory mechanisms to keep its weight within its natural weight range or “set point”.

Your shape, or body type, is even more determined by genetics. Some women tend to have an ‘hour-glass’ figure, with pronounced waist and hips. Others tend to be more ‘straight up and down’. What’s sad is that the woman with curves may dislike her body, while others may envy it, and she might wish she had a more compact figure! But no amount of dieting or toning will give that curvy woman a ‘straight up and down’ frame, or the second woman a curvy body.

Shape and weight are a bit like height and hair, in that they are largely determined by genetics. Since you can't change your height, you accept it. Can you learn to accept your weight at a higher level than you'd previously aimed for? And that you may never have the body type that you've yearned for? Or is your self-esteem totally dependent on your weight being low or your shape being a particular body type? If so, you may want to read over Module 1 (Over-evaluation of Weight and Shape) and Modules 5 and 6 on low self-esteem, from this Information Pack.

What kind of body type does your mother have? Your father? Other family members? What weight were you when you weren't on a diet and not engaging in unhelpful behaviours such as binge eating? What would it take for you to accept that weight, or your current weight, or your body type? What is the cost to you if you don't accept yourself, but continue with your disordered eating habits and weight control behaviours? Jot down some thoughts.



Challenging the Thoughts

In Module 2 we described the use of Thought Diaries to challenge unhelpful thinking. We can use these to challenge some of the thoughts that make up the eating disorder mindset. We can also challenge our related beliefs by conducting Behavioural Experiments (see Module 3).

Ejecting the Eating Disorder Mindset



By now you are probably familiar with what attitudes, expectations, and thoughts are included in your eating disorder mindset. In the previous section, we talked about challenging the eating disorder mindset, either through acceptance of your shape/weight or head on, through using Thought Diaries and Behavioural Experiments. Here's another way of overcoming the Eating Disorder mindset – ejecting the mindset altogether (just like ejecting a DVD).



As with a DVD that keeps getting stuck in the DVD player, sometimes you have to be forceful and eject the mindset because it, too, keeps getting stuck. There are times when you need to force yourself to do what you know is the right thing, and force yourself to stop behaving in ways that are unhelpful to you. Remember, the eating disorder mindset can distort and negatively influence how you see things, which is not helpful to you – it keeps the disordered eating going. You have to remind yourself that there are alternatives, other mindsets/DVDs that are healthier for you, and what you need to do is to replace that old unhelpful thinking with healthier messages. It's like choosing to play a new, more positive DVD.

Ejecting the eating disorder mindset means that you choose to reject - or eject - its attitudes, expectations, and beliefs. Remember, the more you practice ejecting the eating disorder mindset, the easier it will be to do – and the easier it will be to play a new DVD with its healthy, balanced messages.

Trigger Situations



Even though you have begun to experience times when the eating disorder DVD is no longer playing, there will be times when you are still vulnerable. The first step is to recognise the situations that might trigger the mindset and make it more likely that your eating disorder DVD will start playing. This should be easier for you now that you are already having periods of time when you are free of the eating disorder mindset.

We find that certain situations make it more likely that the eating disorder DVD will restart playing old unhelpful messages. Common situations include: having an argument with someone, or feeling depressed (which can lead you to question yourself); breaking an old dietary rule; having a friend go on a diet; regaining weight.

Think about what kind of situations might trigger your eating disorder DVD to start up again. Then think of some healthy responses to that trigger situation, so that if you are faced with a similar situation, you will have already thought of a healthy response. What balanced thought could help you prevent your eating disorder DVD from playing? What could you do that would be healthy?

Trigger situations for my mindset/DVD	Balanced, healthy thoughts	Healthy behaviours
<i>My auntie telling me I look well</i>	<i>She means well, it doesn't mean I'm fat</i>	<i>Don't restrict! Use a Thought Diary</i>

Early Warning Signs that the Mindset/DVD is has 'Clicked' In

Continuing with the DVD example, a DVD might be showing the menu when you put it in a DVD player. However, in certain circumstances, the DVD might begin to play the feature film without warning. Likewise, your eating disorder DVD might start playing unannounced, or just 'click in'. You might find yourself suddenly more preoccupied with thoughts about body shape and weight and control when, for example, you are with your friends, out on a date, or at the gym. You might observe that you become very self-



critical when you have put on a little weight, or experience anxiety when people tell you that you are looking well (which you interpret as looking “fat”). It is really important that you begin to identify these situations as soon as they start, or as soon as the DVD starts, so that you can engage in alternative, healthier ways of behaving.

Follow these steps to deal with the re-emergence of your eating disorder DVD:

1. Learn to recognise the eating disorder mindset as soon as it ‘clicks’ in place.
2. Think about how you would behave and think if you did not have the eating disorder mindset in place. What healthy and helpful behaviours would you carry out? What balanced and helpful attitudes and thoughts could you say to yourself?
3. Then, behave and think AS IF you do not have the eating disorder mindset in place! Use all the helpful strategies that have been described in the previous modules. When you have carried out this third step, you are already ejecting the disorder mindset.



When does the eating disorder mindset take hold? How do you know when the DVD has started to play? It is important to recognise early warning signs, such as dissatisfaction with your body if your favourite jeans are tight. What are some of your early warning signs?

Early warning signs of my mindset/DVD	Balanced, healthy thoughts	Healthy behaviours
<i>I feel like restricting because my friend asked me out to dinner</i>	<i>If I restrict, I'm more likely to binge. I can eat at a restaurant and not gain weight</i>	<i>Eat my afternoon snack anyway so that I won't be too hungry in the evening</i>

What is especially important in all of this is your willingness to tackle and question the mindset. You may have been operating for years under its rules, without questioning its validity. It may have a strong hold on the way you experience the world and yourself. By challenging its messages and deciding to eject the mindset/DVD, you are taking another huge step towards developing a healthier, more balanced way of seeing the world and yourself.

This will all take time, but it's worth it! Freeing yourself from the constrictions of the eating disorder mindset will enable you to experience life without those preoccupations.



Join us in the next module to learn strategies to maintain your gains and prevent relapse.



Module Summary

- The eating disorder mindset is made up of unhelpful patterns of thinking. These messages in turn contribute to maintaining the eating disorder.
- Challenging the mindset involves acceptance and change, and changing one's belief system. These unhelpful attitudes and thoughts can be challenged by using thought diaries to dispute them, and behavioural experiments to test out how accurate they really are.
- Ejecting the eating disorder mindset, or eating disorder DVD, requires recognising the triggers that tend turn it on and early warning signs that it has begun playing. It also requires replacing it with a healthier mindset/DVD.

What I Have Learned in this Module

Think about what you have learned in this module and any useful bits of information, tips or strategies that you want to remember. Write them down below so you can refer to them later.

Think about how you might use the information you have just learned. Write down some ways in which you could make use of this information.

Coming Up...



In Module 9 (Maintaining Progress & Preventing Relapse), we'll look at how you can maintain your gains and work to prevent relapse.



About This Module

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BACKGROUND AND REFERENCES

The concepts and strategies in this module have been developed from evidence-based psychological treatment of eating disorders, primarily Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). This can be found in the following:

- Fairburn, C. G. (1995) *Overcoming Binge Eating*. New York: The Guilford Press
- Fairburn, C. G., Cooper, Z., & Shafran, R. (2003) Cognitive behaviour therapy for eating disorders: a “transdiagnostic” theory and treatment. *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 41, pp 509-528
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