

Food for Thought

A self help booklet



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“I hate being overweight, but I can’t seem to do anything about it. I’ve tried every diet in the book, and slimming clubs, but I always seem to put the weight back on and more”.

“I can’t talk about my feelings. Eating seems to be the only thing that comforts me. I can’t be bothered to cook at the moment and am living on takeaways and fast food”.

“I can’t fit in to any of my nice clothes but I don’t want to buy new ones. I can’t bear to look at myself in the mirror and I’ve stopped going out with my friends”.

“I’ve never really been that bothered by my weight but it has crept on since I gave up work. I can’t face going to the gym, I feel so unfit and out of shape”.

These are all thoughts of people who struggle with their weight.

The aim of this booklet is to help you improve your health and well-being by making changes to your eating and activity levels.

- Are you worried about being overweight?
- Are you worried about your health and how your lifestyle might be affecting this?
- Do you have difficulty exercising because of your weight or because of health problems you might have?
- Do you feel low in mood, or suffer from low self-esteem because of your weight?

If you have answered yes to any of the above, then this booklet might be for you.

How do I use this booklet?

There is a lot of information in this booklet and it may be helpful to read it several times, or read it in small chunks, to get the most from it. The booklet suggests some steps you can take to develop a healthier lifestyle.

There are also some written exercises for you to do. These will help you decide what changes you want to make.

Step 1: Getting and staying motivated

One of the important things to try to do when you are reading this booklet and making changes is to keep motivated.

1. Think of the reasons why you want to change.

Try to create some kind of picture in your mind of how you would like to be, or list all of the benefits of change. Perhaps keep your list somewhere handy so that you can look at it and remind yourself of why you are making these changes along the way. It will help to make it easier to get there.

2. What are the obstacles that might get in the way?

Often when people begin to make changes certain things get in the way. For instance, you might be afraid of hurting yourself if you exercise, or be worried how you might find the time. Try to think about what obstacles might get in the way and how you might overcome them. It might be useful to list the reasons for change, and possible obstacles, side by side. Some examples of this are shown below. Add your own reasons and possible obstacles.

Reasons to make some changes	Obstacles to overcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am already getting joint pains in my knees • I feel out of control with my eating and want to feel more control and happier with eating • I want to feel more confident and attractive and go out with my friends again 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I enjoy eating, especially with friends • It helps me cope with my feelings

3. Be kind to yourself

All day, every day we have conversations with ourselves in our heads. It is so common and automatic that often we don't even notice we are doing it. Often we are far more critical and harsh towards ourselves than we would be to other people.

While you work your way through this booklet try not to criticise yourself if the going gets tough. Everyone lapses and slips along the way to making change, so if this happens to you, don't be too hard on yourself. Also don't forget to congratulate yourself for any steps you take forward too!

So, well done for getting this far through. The fact that you have picked this booklet up and are beginning to read it means you have taken a very good first step forward. It shows that you think you have a problem and are willing to tackle it. Good luck with the changes that you make.

Step 2: Check what your lifestyle is like at the moment

The next step to change is to understand your eating and activity levels as they are at the moment. The best way to do this is to note exactly what you eat; what you drink; what is going on at the time and what your activity levels are like, for a week or two. You may find this difficult at first but it is important to do this for the following reasons:

- It gives you a baseline of what you already do.
- It helps you recognise whether you are eating regularly during the day, or whether you have long gaps (over 3-4 hours) between meals.
- It helps you recognise whether or not you have a balanced diet.
- It shows you any triggers you may have to overeating or restricting your eating, e.g. feeling bored, angry, upset.
- It shows you what gets in the way of you eating more healthily or exercising (so that you can find ways of overcoming the problem) e.g. doing shift work, feeling tired all of the time.
- It means you can see when progress has been made. This is important to help motivate yourself while you are trying to make difficult changes in your life.
- It helps you to remember what you have done. It's easy to forget otherwise.

What should I write down?

Ideally it is a good idea to make note of your eating pattern for a whole week, so you can look at whether there are any differences from day to day. However, if this is difficult, try to do just one day of the week and do it really well. Better to have one complete day than a whole week of patchy information. You should write down the following:

- 1. Time.** Always note what time roughly you ate or drank. This helps you to see the pattern of when you tend to eat more, or avoid eating, and helps you check whether or not you have a healthy eating pattern.
- 2. Food and drink.** Try to write down all the things you eat and drink in a day in as much detail as you can. Say what the food was and how big the portion was. Give details of milk and sugar in drinks and things you add to food e.g. mayonnaise, sauces and spreads.
- 3. What was happening?** In this column you need to record what was happening around you at the time that you were eating. Important things to mention might be events that have just happened, people around you, how you were feeling, thoughts or images that were going through your mind.
- 4. Activity.** Write down any physical activity you have done such as walking, exercise, dancing, housework, gardening etc.

Below is an example of a diary:

Time	Food and drink consumed	What was happening?	Activity
8.30am	Bowl of shreddies, full fat milk. 2 pieces of bread with 4 slices of bacon and 2 fried eggs	Everyone gone out, on my own. Felt good for eating shreddies, but feel bad for eating the rest as well	
10.30am			Went swimming with my little boy

Draw out a similar diary for yourself and try to fill it in daily.

What should I be looking at, once I've filled in the food diary?

Firstly, well done for filling in the food diaries. It is not always easy. Now, before you move on to the next section of this booklet, have a good look at what you have written and think about what your eating is really like at the moment.

It might be helpful to think about the following questions:

- What has surprised or worried you about your eating or activity levels?
- Do you know when you are hungry and when you are full?
- What foods are you eating? Are there any foods that you are avoiding or over-eating?
- When are you eating? Are the gaps longer than 3-4 hours?

- How much food are you eating? What is the size of each meal? Do you think this is too big, too small or about right?
- What are your levels of activity like? Are you always on the go, or do you find it difficult to do any activities or exercise?
- Does how active you are change how much you eat?
- Are there any patterns? For instance, are certain foods linked to certain feelings or situations? Do certain moods stop you from being active or exercising?

Step 3: Learn about what works and what doesn't

Why don't diets work?

If you are reading this booklet it is very likely that you will have been on one diet or another at some point in your life. Although new miracle diets come out all the time, unfortunately research shows that diets don't work. Whilst dieters aim to eat less and therefore lose weight, this aim is rarely achieved in the long term. One reason for this is that most diets make people feel deprived, fed up and frustrated. These feelings tend to lead to diet breaking or over-eating, which in turn trigger thoughts such as "I've blown it now" and often more eating. The consequences of this are that any short-term weight loss is likely to be replaced by simply putting the weight back on.

So, although in the short-term dieting might help you feel good about yourself, your body and your achievement, there are less helpful longer term effects. Another of these is that because generally people can't stick at diets, they are often left feeling like a failure, which can knock confidence and self-esteem. These feelings make it harder to socialise, be active or to exercise. All of which make it harder to continue to lose weight or keep weight off.

If this wasn't bad enough, dieting also affects how well our bodies manage what we eat, and this can make it harder to lose weight too. For example, dieting can significantly slow down your metabolic rate (the speed with which your body uses up the fuel from the food you eat). As you eat less (i.e. go on a diet) your body recognises this and puts itself into a state known as famine alert. It gets the impression that food is scarce and slows down your metabolism to make the best of what it is receiving. As you go back to your old ways of eating or 'come off your diet' you regain weight and often some more, as your metabolism is still in its slowed down mode. This may be why you have noticed that the more diets you have tried in the past the more your weight has actually gone up.

Do you recognise this cycle?

Trigger/Thought

Want to lose weight

e.g.

- Feel and look better
- Improve health
- Increase confidence

Reach previous weight (plus)

Decide to diet

Rigid and restrictive dieting rules

Give up on diet altogether

The Cycle of Dieting

Weight gain due to metabolic changes and cravings for high energy food

Initial weight loss – feel great

Plateau (for metabolic reasons, because maintaining diet becomes boring, and body craves forbidden high energy foods)

Begin to break rigid dietary rules. Maybe begin to feel despondent and guilty. Start having unhelpful thoughts like, 'What's the point in trying' or 'I've blown it now. I may as well eat what I like'.

No longer feel good because weight loss stops. Feel disappointed and maybe self-critical e.g. 'I'm trying hard – why can't I lose weight' or 'I'm obviously not trying hard enough'.

Exercise: My diet history

This is a lot of information to take in, especially as it goes against a lot of what you have probably read and been told in magazines and on the television. Take a few minutes now to think about your own life and the diets you have been on. Try to answer the following questions as truthfully as you can. You may be surprised by the answers.

- When did you start dieting?
- How many years ago was this?
- How much did you weigh when you first started dieting?
- How much did you want to weigh?
- How much do you weigh now?
- How much do you want to weigh now?

What causes people to become overweight?

How people maintain weight

When you are maintaining your weight, the energy you take in from food or drink matches the energy your body uses up from metabolism and activity.

How people lose weight

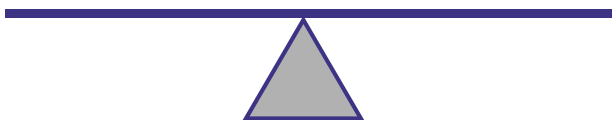
In order to lose weight you need to eat less energy and/or use up more energy by being more active.

How people gain weight

When you gain weight it means you have taken in more energy than you need and/or used up less energy from activity.

Energy in
(food eaten)

Energy out
(activity)



So if diets don't work, but I'm overweight, how can I lose weight?

Although diets aren't the answer, there are things that you can do to change the way that you eat and alter your activity levels. These things will help you to successfully lose weight together with improving your health, increasing your fitness levels and feeling better about yourself. The rest of this booklet will look at how you can make these changes without dieting.

Step 4: Adopting a healthy eating plan

Is healthy eating just a diet by a different name?

Definitely not! The word diet means the mixture of food a person eats. By definition healthy eating is a way of eating that will keep you healthy. It is not a diet in the sense that it is not just about weight loss and it is not something you start and then stop. Healthy eating is a style of eating that you can stick to for the rest of your life – it's something that becomes a part of everyday life and can fit around what your life is like.

Healthy eating is not about so called 'good' foods such as brown rice, lentils, salads, etc. Healthy eating is not about restricting your foods or depriving yourself. Healthy eating is about having a balance to your eating, but foods are not divided into 'good' or 'bad' foods. There are no foods you should avoid, and no foods you must eat.

Healthy eating is not about quick weight loss. The reason it is called 'healthy eating' is because it is important for keeping you well and improving your health. When you begin to make changes to your eating pattern, you may not see weight loss immediately. As you lose fat and build muscle through healthy eating and exercise you will notice your body shape change.

One pound of body fat (1lb/0.5kg) has an energy store of approximately 3500 calories. To lose 1lb of weight you need to find a deficit or gap of 3,500 calories.

Divide 3,500 by 7 (days) = 500 - 600 calorie deficit per day. In theory this will lead to a weight loss of 1lb per week. This is where the phrase “creating a 600 calorie deficit” comes from. A deficit of 300 - 400 calories per day will lead to 0.5lb/0.25kg loss per week.

Finding a 600 calorie deficit

- 1.** Monitor your food intake and activity levels using a diary.
- 2.** From your diary identify food choices or patterns and physical activity that you can alter. Look to see if you can:
 - reduce portion sizes of high energy foods that you eat regularly
 - alter the frequency of certain foods e.g. fewer biscuits, chocolate, crisps, more vegetables
 - change the types of food you eat e.g. lower fat or sugar varieties
 - increase your energy output by doing more activities you enjoy or already do regularly e.g. walking, housework.

You may notice weight loss from around your waist and this shows you are losing some of your fat stores. Weight loss is likely to be slow but the advantage of this is that slow weight loss (i.e. 1lb/0.5kg a week) has a much better chance of being permanent weight loss. This is because when you lose weight too quickly you usually lose muscle and water as well as fat stores. However when you regain weight it is usually as fat not muscle.

Another advantage to slow weight loss is that it means you don't have to be hungry. This is important. The hungrier we get, the more likely we are to choose high-energy foods or to over-eat, both of which makes it much more difficult to lost weight. Eating regularly (i.e. 3 - 4 times a day), healthily and drinking enough fluid can help to avoid feeling hungry.

Finally healthy eating is not just about what you eat. In order to make the most of healthy eating, looking at your activity levels and the psychological factors involved in eating are also very important. What we mean by the term healthy eating then is that it is about your whole body and mind being healthy.

So what is healthy eating?

For a balanced diet we need to eat a variety of foods. There is no such food as a 'bad' or 'forbidden' food that you should not be eating. Yes, some foods are healthier for our bodies than others. Yes, some foods contain more nutrients and minerals than others. But there is no such thing as a food that you should never eat.

When we become tempted to ban a food or exclude it from our diet, the food simply becomes extra tempting. It's human nature. We might try to resist the food but we end up eating it anyway. Usually when we are not even hungry!

The other thing that happens is that when you eat a food you have labelled as 'bad' you are much more likely to criticise yourself for eating it. It takes the pleasure away from eating the food, you feel guilty or ashamed for eating it, and so the sense of satisfaction attached to eating the food vanishes too. In addition, because you are telling yourself you shouldn't be eating it, you are likely to eat more of it; you are already promising yourself 'this is the last time I will eat this so make the most of it'. Denying yourself particular foods is not healthy eating.

Choosing a balanced diet

There is no single food that provides us with all the nutrients we need. Healthy eating involves having a mixture of foods that provide you with the right balance of nutrients for your body to stay healthy and reduce the risk of developing certain diseases. The main nutrients are protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals. Also included with these are fibre and fluid.

Proteins

These are the basic body-building materials. They help us grow, replace and repair damaged and worn parts.

Protein is found in animal foods such as milk, meat, fish, cheese and eggs. It is also found in vegetable foods like peas, beans, pulses and nuts.

Carbohydrates

We need these as fuel to keep us warm and to provide energy for breathing and activity, including the brain and central nervous system cells.

They are often called the ‘starchy’ foods. Carbohydrates are found in foods such as bread, flour, potatoes, breakfast cereals, pasta and rice. Sugar is also a carbohydrate found naturally in fruit and added to foods like sweets, cakes, biscuits and soft drinks.

Fats

We need fat to provide fuel to keep us warm and to provide us with energy for all the body functions. Fat is also needed to provide certain vitamins and essential fatty acids, e.g. omega 3 found in certain fish and seeds. The body cushions our vital organs with fat and it insulates us against extreme temperatures. Having fat present in our diets also helps to prevent overeating as it helps us to feel “full” – it helps to control our appetite.

Fat is found in foods such as butter, cream, lard and suet. Liquid fats or oils are produced from seeds and nuts (i.e. sunflower, olive or walnut oil). Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts. Fat is “hidden” in a lot of foods e.g. biscuits, cakes, chocolate, cheese, pastry and crisps. Eat products with hidden fats and sugar less often, and in small amounts.

Some fats are better for our bodies than others. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats have far more health benefits than saturated fat, which is known to adversely affect circulation and the health of the heart.

Vitamins and minerals

These are essential nutrients needed by our bodies in tiny amounts and found in a very wide range of foods. To get the right balance of these requires us to eat a variety of foods on a daily basis.

Fibre

This is needed to keep the digestive system healthy. It is known that fibre can help with appetite and it also helps to regulate cholesterol and sugar in the body. Fibre is found in starchy foods, especially wholemeal or whole grain varieties and in fruit, vegetables, pulses, beans and nuts. It is not found in foods of animal origin.

Fluid

We need sufficient fluid to prevent dehydration and to keep the digestive system healthy. Sometimes when you feel hungry you may need a drink rather than something to eat. You should aim to drink at least 6-8 drinks a day, which is the equivalent of 1½ litres or 3-4 pints. Fluids include water, tea, coffee, soft drinks and milk. Limit fruit juice/smoothies to 150ml a day.

Fruit and vegetables

These contain active ingredients that react with our bodies to prevent diseases. They provide us with fibre, vitamins and minerals and frozen or canned fruit and vegetables are just as healthy for us as fresh fruit and vegetables.

The Eatwell Guide: What it looks like

We need different types of foods in differing amounts. We need more carbohydrates and fruit and vegetables than proteins or fats. A balanced eating plate for a day would look something like this:



Many of the meals we eat come as a mixture of more than one food group. By breaking the meal down you can match the ingredients with the food group.

For example:

A ham salad sandwich

Contains	Food group	Portions
2 slices of bread	Carbohydrates	2
2 thin slices ham	Protein	1
Variety of salad	Fruit and vegetables	2
1 teaspoon low fat spread	Fats and sugars	1

A small tuna sweetcorn pizza and salad

Contains	Food group	Portions
Bread base	Carbohydrates	2
Tuna	Protein	1
Cheese	Milk and dairy	1
Sweetcorn, tomatoes and mushrooms	Fruit and vegetables	1
Variety of salad	Fruit and vegetables	1

How much food is a portion?

When you have had problems with your weight it can often be difficult to know what a normal portion of food looks like. Below are some examples of a single portion size for the different food groups. There are also recommendations for the total number of portions to have each day. Try to spread your portions over your meals and snacks throughout the day.

Carbohydrates: bread, rice, pasta, cereals and potatoes

- 1 slice of bread
- ½ bread roll
- 3 tablespoons cereal
- 3 crackers/crispbreads
- 1 small potato
- 2 tablespoons rice/pasta (cooked)

Milk and dairy foods

- 1/3 pint (200 ml) milk
- 1 small pot yoghurt/cottage cheese/fromage frais
- 1-1½oz (30-40g) cheese

Fruit and vegetables (at least 5 a day)

- 2 tablespoons vegetables
- Small salad
- 1 fruit
- 2 tablespoons tinned/stewed fruit
- 150 ml (small glass) fruit juice
- 1 tablespoon dried fruit

Protein: meat, fish, chicken, eggs, nuts and pulses

Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat.

- 3-4oz (70 -100g) beef, pork, ham, lamb, liver, chicken, oily fish
- 4-5oz (100 -150g) white fish (not in batter)
- 2 eggs (medium)
- 3 tablespoons baked beans
- 1 tablespoon (1oz/30g) nuts/nut products e.g. peanut butter
- 3 cooked tablespoons pulse based dish (lentils, peas, beans)

Fatty and sugary foods

Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts.

- 1 teaspoon butter/margarine/spread
- 2 teaspoons low fat spread
- 1 teaspoon oil/lard/dripping
- 1 teaspoon mayonnaise/salad dressing

Hidden fat e.g. in fatty bacon, sausages, pastry, pork pie, sausage roll, crisps, fatty gravies, cream doughnuts, biscuits, cakes, ice-cream, chocolates etc.

Sugar e.g. added to drinks, in soft drinks, sweets, jellies
Eat products with hidden fats and sugar in less often, and in small amounts.

Exercise

What are the changes to your eating that you would like to make?

Before you move on to the next section, take a few minutes to think about three things that you can do to make your diet more like the Eatwell Guide.

1.
2.
3.

Step 5: Understanding the psychological influences on your eating

We don't always eat just because we are hungry. In fact for some people real hunger is one of the least important reasons for wanting food. Celebrations, boredom, habit, and negative feelings can all be reasons for eating. Comfort and compulsive eating can be used as a way of covering up feelings and needs, rather than being aware of them or dealing with them.

One of the obstacles to healthy eating may be that eating has become something which gives you other positive things rather than simply making you feel full up or giving you energy. In other words whilst eating is really about providing your body physically with the energy to function and stay healthy, we often actually eat for our heads instead – out of habit, to make us feel

better in some way, or to take away horrible thoughts. In our society from being children we learn lots of different reasons for eating. The quiz below may help you to recognise what your psychological reasons for eating are.

What has influenced your eating?

It is important to remember that trying to maintain your weight is not merely a case of “self control”. There are many factors that influence what we eat and when we eat it. Tick any of the following that apply to you.

- I eat the children’s leftovers rather than seeing “waste”
- I was deprived of food as a child. I therefore learned to stock up when I could to avoid hunger
- Others buy me sweets and cakes as presents/treats
- Being criticised by others about my eating habits or appearance makes me eat
- I sometimes misread other body sensations, for example being tired, as hunger I don’t know when I’m full
- I eat to cope with emotions such as anger, boredom, loneliness etc.
- I eat as a reward
- I’m too busy/I’m too embarrassed to exercise
- I have some unhelpful beliefs, for example “It’s my fault, I’ve not got the willpower”
- I have peer pressure to eat the “healthy option”, and end up feeling deprived or defiant

As you can see, there are numerous reasons why people eat and often few of these are actually linked to hunger. By recognising the ways we eat to help us cope with life, we can begin to find other ways of coping with the same situations.

Exercise

From your diaries and the quiz above, can you identify any times or reasons you eat when you're not hungry? Make a list of as many alternative ways of coping that you can think of and try them out to see which one works best.

It may be necessary to plan in advance for tricky times e.g.

- Practice in advance what you are going to say to the person who always wants you to have a second helping.
- Make a shopping list which includes healthy snacks you like.
- Plan appetising healthy teas for times when you are alone.
- Arrange to spend time with a friend.
- Buy the materials and start a new needlework or art project.

Write down your plans and tick them off as you do them.

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Step 6: Mindful eating

In Step 5 it was highlighted that we don't always eat when we are hungry e.g. emotional and social eating. Other times we may eat on 'automatic pilot', e.g. eating while watching television. Such 'automatic pilot' behaviours involve paying attention to something that is not eating. Tick any of the following that may apply to you.

- Have you ever finished a meal without being aware of having eating it?
- Have you ever finished a packet of crisps or biscuit and immediately gone and eaten a second one?
- Do you ever buy 2 for 1 because it's a bargain, without considering if you really want it that much?
- Do you buy the re-sealable snack bags/boxes e.g. crisps, chocolate? If so, once they're open do you ever reseal them?
- Do you eat everything on your plate even when you are not hungry, just because it is something you have been told to do since childhood?
- Do you eat your meals in front of the T.V?

All these describe times when we eat without being fully aware.

The opposite of 'automatic pilot' is called Mindful Eating; bringing attention to the present moment by being fully aware and experiencing the many thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations that can arise from eating. Mindful eating encourages you to slow down your eating to be fully engaged and aware of the process. This is important as it takes 20 minutes for the stomach to send messages to our brain to tell us we are full.

Eating can be a multi sensory experience, sight, smells, taste, touch and hearing are all important. Being aware of this multi sensory experience enables us to be aware of how our body responds to food. To practice mindful eating try the following exercise that enables awareness to unfold within the moment to moment experience of eating.

Mindful eating exercise

Set aside five to 10 minutes when you can be alone. Read the following instructions below to get an idea of what is required. You should try to spend twenty to thirty seconds on each of the following stages. You can use raisins, crisps, grapes or any other finger food you choose.

1. Begin by **holding** the piece of food in your hand. Can you feel the weight? Turn it over between your fingers, exploring its texture. How does it feel to **touch** it in the other hand?
2. Take the time to **see** the food. Examine the shape, colours and textures. Notice how the light hits the food.
3. Now, holding it beneath your nose, see what you notice when you breathe in? **How does it smell?**
4. Slowly take the food into your mouth and notice how your hand automatically knows where to put it. Without chewing, explore the food with your tongue. When you're ready, take a bite and notice the effects on the food. Continue **slowly** chewing and bring your attention to the **taste**.
5. Prior to **swallowing**, notice what the tongue does to prepare you for swallowing. See if you can follow the sensations of swallowing the food.
6. Finally, once you have finished eating the food bring your attention to the after taste.

How do you feel? Is it different from the usual way you eat that food? Did it taste, smell, look different than if you'd just eaten without paying attention?

Mindful eating tips

1. In the moment

Ensure you are in an environment without too many distractions when eating e.g. don't eat whilst watching T.V. or reading. This will ensure you are fully aware of what you are eating and whether you are starting to get full. You will be using your senses of sight, smell, taste and touch to let yourself know you are full and have eaten as much as you want to.

Chew your food completely until it is uniformly smooth before swallowing, or put your utensils down between mouthfuls. This will help to slow your eating down and make you more aware of becoming full.

2. Observe

Notice your body; do you have a rumbling stomach, low energy. Feeling stressed out, hungry, thirsty? Recognise your thoughts and emotions that arise from being hungry, when you're eating and afterwards. Prior to eating ask yourself the following questions: Am I hungry? Am I thirsty? When eating, check in with your body to see how hungry you are; are you satisfied, full, empty?

3. Attention

Eat slowly, paying attention to the smell, taste, sound, texture and look of the food. Is the food crunchy, sweet, salty, smooth or spicy? Does the food change taste?

4. Always divide 'family sized' or 'to share' size bags of crisps or sweets into individual portions (possibly even into 100kcal or 200kcal portions), that way you will be aware of how much you have consumed and can choose how much or little you want to have.

Store tempting or trigger foods in less convenient locations – the saying 'out of sight out of mind' has never been more appropriate.

Swap plates to smaller plates.

Step 7: Increasing your physical activity levels

Combined with healthy eating, an active life can help you to lose weight. Any activity is better than no activity. Don't feel you have to push yourself too hard or too quickly. You simply need to do what suits you, and then build up from there.

What sort of activity do I need to be doing?

Any increase to your general activity levels is a step in the right direction. For example, activities such as gardening, walking, dancing, household chores, all count towards becoming more active as well as more active types of exercise such as swimming, aerobics, badminton etc.

Walking can often be the best form of exercise to begin with, as it requires no equipment or expense and it has many health benefits. If you are worried about your current level of fitness it can also be a low-impact and low risk form of activity to begin with. Regular walking can reduce heart disease, strokes, diabetes, bowel cancer, blood pressure and the risk of osteoporosis. It can reduce anxiety, depression and stress. Walking can increase confidence and self-esteem, stamina, energy levels, help you sleep better and improve the functioning of your heart and lungs. Walking also burns the same amount of calories as jogging. So it all counts!!

How much activity do I need to be doing?

For general health and fitness it is recommended that we all do 30 minutes of moderately intensive activity five or more times a week. Whilst 30 minutes might sound like a lot, especially when you think about doing something nearly every day of the week, it doesn't have to all be done in one go. You can break the 30 minutes down into chunks, such as three lots of ten minutes, or six lots of five minutes. This can make it much easier to fit into the other demands of your life, and help you to not over-do it if you have not exercised for a long time. So, for example, you could do five minutes of vacuuming before you go to work, or a ten minute walk at lunchtime, followed by five minutes of

dancing round the house in the evening. Or how about fitting 15 minutes of gardening and a 15 minute swim into your day? Once you start to get creative it's amazing how much activity there is that you can fit around your current lifestyle.

It was mentioned above that the activity should be of moderate intensity. What this means is that for the activity to be of maximum benefit it should make you feel warmer, cause your pulse to increase slightly whilst you are doing it, make you breathe faster and more deeply, but not be so energetic that you cannot keep talking whilst you are doing the activity!

Exercise

Try to think of all the sorts of activities you might enjoy and how long you could do them for in a way that would fit in with your current lifestyle.

Write your thoughts here

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How can I get started?

Once you've thought about the types of activity you might enjoy and how to fit them into your day, the next step is to get started. Here are some useful tips for beginning to make these changes to your activity levels:

- Plan your activity in advance, as this makes it easier to stick to it.
- Set specific goals that you want to achieve.
- Think before you drive less than a mile and walk to your destination instead.

- If you use the bus, get off a stop earlier than usual and walk the extra bit instead.
- Park the car further away at the supermarket car park.
- Take the stairs instead of the lift (or get off the lift a floor early and walk the last flight instead).
- Take the dog for a walk instead of letting someone else do it.
- Reward yourself for any activity goals that you achieved.

I've never liked exercise, so how can I keep my motivation going?

You may have had bad experiences with exercise or activity in the past, or you may have never found a form of exercise that you enjoy. We hope that widening out the list to include as many forms of activity as possible you may find something that is right for you. Other tips for keeping your motivation going might include walking with a friend so you don't find excuses not to go, or joining a walking group so you can enjoy chatting to others as you exercise. Try to make sure to build in as much variety as you can as well, so that you don't get bored. Perhaps you could also note what you have achieved; is it easier now to climb the stairs, have your activity levels increased? This can act as a motivation booster, as you can then see the benefits of keeping going. Ask your GP or practice nurse about Healthy Living Centres as these are great places to try out activities with like-minded people.

What if I've got health problems that get in the way of being active?

Whether you have health problems or not it is always important to not overdo activity to begin with, so that your body gets the chance to adjust and become fitter gradually. Before any activity here are some useful tips to remember:

Build up – for example if you go for a walk, begin slowly and then gradually increase your speed of walking. Don't start off at full pelt and then get out of breath too quickly so that you have to stop.

Slow down or stop if you are having problems.

Sit if you are unable to stand – there are still lots of exercises you can do whilst sitting, ask your GP for advice on this.

Only progress when you can cope easily with each stage.

There are often 'exercise on prescription' schemes for people who want to lose weight but who have health problems that might make it hard for them to do so. Ask your GP or practice nurse how to be referred.

Step 8. Improving your body image

Today's culture makes it very easy to believe that you can only be attractive if you are the 'ideal' size (whatever that is).

Through the ages the 'ideal' size has changed. Rubens painted men and women in the early 1600's who were full fleshed and blooming and considered as the height of beauty. Different cultures value generous figures for men and women as this is a sign of prosperity, fertility and health.

More recently, newspapers have begun reporting concern over super-thin models, and clothing shops such as Evans and Marks & Spencer have finally recognised that the average woman is larger than a size 14.

Hence we are now hit with mixed messages regarding attractiveness:

- A.** The dieting industry maintains dissatisfaction in our bodies by selling us the belief that only young and thin people are happy, sexy, attractive and healthy.
- B.** A range of 'newer' messages are stressing that being thin can be unhealthy, and that larger sizes are more realistic and attractive.

What is Attractive?

Attractiveness is a complex thing. What makes you feel attracted to a person? Does it include any of the following?

- Hair
- Sense of humour
- Hands and nails
- Skin
- Facial expressions (e.g. smiles)
- Sensitivity
- Clothing sense
- Voice and laughter
- Intelligence
- Confidence in themselves
- Income
- Hobbies
- Eyes
- Generosity
- Religious beliefs
- Height
- Warm and loving
- Loves children
- Good cook
- Any others

This list doesn't even include a person's figure! If you analyse what you find appealing, you may realise that weight plays a smaller part than you think.

The truth is that all sizes, ages and shapes of men and women can be attractive and sexy. You could ask a friend or partner to complete a list of what makes you attractive to them. You may be surprised.

How can you improve your own body image?

- 1.** When looking in the mirror – try to view the whole of yourself. Do not focus on the bits you particularly dislike.
- 2.** Write a list of a few positive things about you or things that you are proud of. Or keep a 'positive notebook' and note down the times when someone has paid you a compliment, or you have felt good about yourself.
- 3.** Look out for men and women who are larger and attractive. Recognise that size is not everything.
- 4.** Do not put yourself down with negative self-talk. Instead focus on the positive e.g. Instead of "I'm fat and horrible, my bum is disgusting, look at the state of me", try saying – "I'm womanly and generous, I'm strong and healthy, I'm loveable and have gorgeous skin. My hair is thick and lush".
- 5.** Take up an activity that increases your muscle tone e.g. yoga, gardening, walking.
- 6.** Walk tall – do not slouch – but push your shoulders back and hold yourself with pride. Research has shown that if you walk with pretend confidence this can actually send messages to your brain that will make you become more confident – so give it a go!
- 7.** Go out and buy sexy, colourful, fun, modern clothes that look good on you now, do not wait to buy clothes "when I lose weight". You can look good as you are!

Name calling

Individuals who differ from the standard 'norm' in any way are at risk of being noticed. People who are greater or lesser than average height and weight, those who are of a different race, colour or have different beliefs and cultural practices, those with disabilities who look different – or even those who choose to dress differently may all be at risk of comment from fellow citizens.

Some extremes are considered acceptable, for example models who are seen as beautiful freaks (extremely tall and thin, or unusually unflawed skin etc), baseball players are freakishly tall, distance runners are frequently tiny and boyish, sumo wrestlers are powerful and extremely heavy, Page 3 models usually have disproportionate breast sizes.

However, in day to day existence – all of these people will experience comments and unasked for attention from others. It is vital to develop ways of dealing with such comments to minimise the impact it has on your mood, self-esteem and day to day actions.

What makes name calling upsetting?

Name calling is upsetting as it frequently makes people question themselves – they give credibility to the criticism made, for example, thinking “I must be unattractive and lazy if I am fat”. “People will not like me as I am big”. Name calling by others can lead to you using the same ‘put-downs’ on yourself. This can knock your self-esteem and self-confidence a great deal. Name calling can also make you feel angry or upset, feelings which can increase your chances of over-eating. It can also make it much harder to face other people or new situations, reducing your activity levels and reducing the pleasure you get from life. For these reasons it can be really important to learn how to deal with name calling, so that it doesn't affect you in these ways.

Dealing with name calling

It is important to hold on to the following information; name calling is unfair and often untrue (e.g. most larger people are neither unattractive nor lazy), and those who name call are likely to be ignorant, and full of insecurities themselves. Those who feel bad about themselves frequently try to boost their egos by putting others down. Therefore they are by no means superior.

There are a number of strategies you can use to prevent name calling from being so upsetting to you:

- Remind yourself that their comments are irrelevant.
- Reassure yourself that you are worthwhile – after all you know yourself much better than they know you.
- Remember they are the ones with the problem, not you.
- Think in advance about how to deal with it if it happens – for example will you just walk away or do you want to reply? If you want to say something, having a list of standard replies can help you deal with it on the spur of the moment.
- Do not mind-read – staring does not necessarily mean a person is criticising you in their head.
- Do not avoid going out – overcome anxiety about meeting people by going out and doing it.
- Chat to a friend who can help challenge the criticism if you can't manage to do this for yourself.

Step 9: Putting it all together

You have nearly reached the end of this booklet, and you will have read about lots of changes that you can make to your eating and activity levels to become healthier, fitter and happier.

Most people find that working towards and realising a goal is motivating and satisfying, but it is also important to give yourself the best chance of success by selecting the right goals in the first place. Change is not always easy, especially sticking with it through thick and thin; and slips or lapses along the way are expected. These are a very normal part of making any changes, so don't be put off by them if and when they happen.

To give yourself the best chance of success, you will find some guidelines for SMART goal setting.

Specific goals are best. By setting clearly defined goals you can take pride in achieving those goals as you can measure what you have achieved. For example: It is not measurable to say you want to be 'healthier' and 'fitter', but it is measurable to say you want to be 'fit enough to swim 10 lengths of the swimming pool'.

Make gradual changes that can be maintained. For example, cut down sugar in tea, not cutting it out altogether; eating Quavers instead of ordinary crisps; taking each thing upstairs as you need. These are small goals that will not be too difficult to sustain in your everyday life. Maintenance of a few small goals is better than taking on a big goal that you cannot sustain and end up feeling bad about it when you do not do it.

Achievable goals. If you make your goals too high then it is likely you will give up and become demoralised. For example, take the goals 'to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day'. Is this realistic for you or will it be too difficult? If it is too difficult, think about changing the goal to something like 'eat

three portions of fruit and vegetables 4 days of the week'. This goal can be as big or as small as you feel is right for you.

Reward yourself for what you achieve. Acknowledging what you have achieved is very important. Do remember the small things that you have added and congratulate yourself for them as they all add up. You might also want to give yourself tangible rewards for your achievements: e.g. buy a magazine, have an hour to yourself, take a relaxing bath, etc.

Try not to tackle too many goals at once. This avoids becoming overwhelmed by lots of goals. For example it may be difficult to change a lot of your eating habits all at once. To eat more fruit and vegetables, cut down biscuits, have smaller portions, and change to skimmed milk all at once may prove to be a bit too much. Also, if you can prioritise goals you can direct your attention to the most important ones.

Step 10: Keeping going with the changes you have made

Congratulations on completing this booklet and for beginning to think about making some lifestyle changes for healthier living. Making the changes is a great start, but it is also important to plan how you can help yourself to maintain and build on these achievements for the future ahead.

Here are some ways of helping to keep your motivation up:

- Keep making small steps to change – don't try to race too quickly. Think of the changes as training for a marathon, not a 100 metres sprint!
- Don't set unrealistic goals for yourself – it is always better to set a goal you can manage than pushing yourself towards a goal you will fail at.

- Find ways of rewarding and valuing yourself for your achievements. This is really important. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to a best friend or loved one. Don't brush off your achievements, but make sure you find the time to acknowledge them instead.
- Find someone you can trust to encourage you – it can often be really helpful to have someone alongside who can keep you motivated when the going gets tough.
- Remember that everyone slips up from time to time so slips are to be expected. If you anticipate a slip or lapse it means you can plan for it, learn from it and move on. So, even if you've had difficulty keeping to your plans, simply take the time to review your goals to see if you can find other ways of moving forward instead.
- Talk to family and friends. Explain how you are trying to change your eating habits and encourage their support and understanding.
- Keep a list of reasons to change on paper, as a reminder for if you are finding it hard to keep going. Maybe read through this booklet again, or refer back to the exercises to see how far you have come and why you started on this journey in the first place.
- Keep focused on what has changed for you so far (even small changes). Remember 3 out of 7 healthy eating days are better than none!
- Keep alternative coping strategies for managing difficult times e.g. coping with negative feelings by going to bed and watching a comforting video, going for walk with the dog, doing something you enjoy outside e.g. gardening.
- Plan in a positive way for the week e.g. arrange for someone to baby-sit for a night, arrange to meet a friend for a cup of tea, plan to watch a film on TV.

- Devise your own personal list to put off emotional cravings to eat and to manage bad feelings e.g. jigsaws, colouring in, crosswords, write down bad thoughts, any form of absorbing distraction, gardening, dancing, phone a friend.
- Keep on meal planning and shopping for healthy eating.

Useful organisations

- **B-EAT**

Adult Helpline: 0345 634 1414 or email: help@beat.co.uk

Youthline: 0345 634 7650 or email: fyp@beat.co.uk

www.beat.co.uk

Provides advice, support and training to individuals with eating disorders, their carers, and the professionals working in this field wherever you live in the UK.

- **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**

Tel: 01455 883 316

www.bacp.co.uk

Offers an information service providing contacts for counselling in England and Wales.

- **Healthwatch**

www.healthwatch.co.uk

Healthwatch England is the independent consumer champion for health and social care in England. Working with local Healthwatch networks, we ensure that the voices of consumers and those who use services reach the ears of the decision makers.

- **Mental Health Matters (National)**

Tel: 0191 516 3500

www.mentalhealthmatters.com

Provides support and information on employment, housing, community support and psychological services.

- **Mind Infoline**

Tel: 0300 123 3393

Text: 86463

www.mind.org.uk

Provides information on a range of topics including types of mental distress, where to get help, drug and alternative treatments and advocacy. Also provides details of help and support for people in their own area.

- **NHS Choices – Your health, your choices**
www.nhs.uk
 Information about conditions, treatments, local services and healthy lives.
- **Overeaters Anonymous**
 Tel: 07000 784 985
 Email: general@oagb.org.uk
www.oagb.org.uk
 Provides nationwide meetings and support to overeaters.
- **Rethink**
 Helpline: 0300 500 0927
www.rethink.org
 Provides information and a helpline for anyone affected by mental health problems.
- **NIWE Eating Distress Service**
 Tel: 0191 221 0233
www.niwe.org.uk
 Email: enquiries@niwe.org.uk
 A voluntary organisation which runs groups for sufferers and offers a telephone helpline. Can signpost to support in your area. Also provides training to professionals.
- **North Tyneside Talking Therapies**
 Tel: 0191 295 2775
www.northumbria.nhs.uk/talkingtherapies
 Offers a range of talking therapies and courses for people 16+ in North Tyneside registered with a North Tyneside GP who are feeling stressed, anxious, low in mood or depressed.
 Wallsend Health Centre, The Green, Wallsend, NE28 7PD

Useful books

- **The food and mood handbook: how what you eat can transform how you feel**

Amanda Geary Thorsons 2001

This book introduces many key issues and gives practical self-help advice on: sugar sensitivity, the caffeine effect, stresses on your system, supplements, low GI foods, allergy culprits (wheat/milk). With recipes and tips from project participants.

- **The kitchen shrink: foods and recipes for a healthy mind**

Natalie Savona Duncan Baird Publishers 2008

Nutritionist Natalie Savona shows how what we eat can dramatically affect our state of mind. Each chapter is carefully devised to combine comprehensive, up-to-date, clear information with practical advice.

References

A full list of references is available on request by emailing pic@ntw.nhs.uk

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