

Behavioral Health Bariatric Virtual Group Handbook

Welcome to Bariatric Behavioral Health Group!

- This group will be 4 sessions. Each session will be about 90 minutes long. Plan to be present for the entire group meeting. If you arrive late or leave early, you will not get credit for the group session and will have to schedule a make-up.
- Set aside time for the group, and do not engage in other tasks during the group.
- Join the meeting from a private space and make sure others in your home or office are not present and cannot see the screen or hear the conversation. If others are at home with you, please ask them not to enter the room while you are participating in the group.
- If small children need to be present, please keep them occupied, preferably with headphones, so they cannot hear the group conversations.
- Please figure out the best way to minimize disruptions by pets and small children.
- If you attend from your workplace, do not do it during work hours and do not engage in work during the group.
- Driving or riding in a moving vehicle are not permitted during the group.
- Your name will appear on the screen. Please use only your first name and last initial.
- Please keep your video on for the entire group meeting. If your video is off without explanation, you will have to be removed from the group.

- Turn off your phone and other electronic devices (unless you are using them to attend the group meeting) and put them away during the group meetings.
- If using a phone, use the “Do not disturb” function to prevent incoming calls. If you frequently receive calls during a meeting, you will have to be removed from the meeting.
- If you are using a phone or other mobile device to attend the group, place it in a stable location.
- Please be seated or standing, and do not lie down, recline, or walk around during the group.
- Do not watch television, listen to the radio, podcasts etc. during the visit.
- Because this is group therapy, we ask that you only share information you are comfortable sharing and that is relevant to treatment.
- Do not reveal personal information about other group participants outside the group.
- Do not take any screenshots or photos or audio recordings of the session.
- Do not eat or smoke during the group.
- Drinking water is okay, but do not drink soda, coffee, or alcohol during the group.
- Do not attend the group under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or other substances.

- Dress as you would dress for an in-person group meeting. Please be fully dressed in appropriate clothing.
- Do not display political, sexually explicit, or potentially offensive material (posters, banners, T-shirts, signs etc.) where it is visible to the group.
- The first session is mandatory. If you miss the first session or arrive significantly late or leave early, you will have to start over in an upcoming group.
- You are allowed one make-up if you miss one of sessions 2 through 4. If you miss more than one session, you will have to repeat the group in an upcoming cycle. **You are responsible for calling to schedule your make up session.**
- Once you have completed the 4-week group, you will be required to meet with your group leader or another psychologist for an individual session.
- After you complete the 4-week group and the individual session, you will be scheduled to attend a support group once a month. This group is required if you are planning on bariatric surgery, and you must continue to attend until you have surgery, even if you have already been approved by Nutrition and Behavioral Health
- Please call the number below in advance to cancel. If you do not call to cancel, your visit may be marked as a no show.
- Please be polite and courteous to everyone. Do not intentionally interrupt and give others time to talk.

Below are listings of several web sites that may help you increase your knowledge of bariatric surgery. Please read everything with the understanding that bariatric surgery affects everyone differently. Procedures offered in this program include **sleeve gastrectomy** and **roux-en-Y gastric** bypass.

<https://asmbs.org/>

The American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery

<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/bariatric-surgery/potential-candidates>

U. S. Government agency site reviewing obesity treatment options

<https://www.obesityhelp.com/>

A commercial, wide ranging site with chat rooms and recipes

The following web site has lots of scientifically supported advice and strategies to help you lose weight, as well as healthy, low calorie recipes. Highly recommended, whether or not you are considering surgery.

https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/eat/index.htm

U. S. Government agency site with practical and specific weight loss advice, including menu plans, tips on shopping, eating in restaurants etc.

Goals and Expectations Before Bariatric Surgery

The Bariatric Surgery Team requires you to meet the following goals before you can be approved for surgery.

General

- Talk to your insurance company to make sure you qualify for surgery.
- Schedule a height and weight check with your PCP or Nutrition.

Medical.

- Be up-to-date on annual physical and screening tests such as colonoscopy, mammogram, Pap, sleep study, required lab tests.
- Have chronic medical conditions stabilized.

Nutrition

- Attend individual meetings and group sessions with nutrition education specialist. These are required until you have surgery.
- Follow all nutrition guidelines.
- Attend nutrition pre-operative class.

Behavioral Health

- Attend the 4-week behavior modification group.
- Practice strategies presented in the group.
- Attend individual follow-up at end of 4-week group.
- Attend all monthly group visits. These are required until you have surgery.
- Attend additional individual appointments as required.
- Allow consultation with other mental or behavioral health providers.
- Have behavioral health conditions stabilized.

Behavioral Health Requirements

Before Behavioral Health can approve you for surgery, we must see evidence of the following:

- Goal setting and tracking progress toward goals
- Consistent completion of food records
- Regular eating (3-5 times daily, 3-5 hours between meals/snacks)
- Ability and willingness to plan and prepare healthy meals and snacks
- Regular weigh-ins (preferably weekly) and keeping a record of weight
- Consistent engagement in some form of physical activity.
- Elimination of the following:
 - Alcohol
 - Marijuana
 - Other addictive drugs
 - Nicotine
 - Smoking of any kind
 - Caffeine
 - Carbonated Beverages
- Weight loss
 - Weight loss prior to surgery is required by most insurance companies to demonstrate ability to follow diet and exercise recommendations.
 - Usually not a specific requirement, but aim for 5-10% of current body weight.
 - You will not be approved for surgery if you gain weight during the program.

Overview of Behavioral Skills and Strategies for Successful Weight Loss Before and After Bariatric Surgery

1. Setting Goals and Tracking Progress (pages 10-12)
2. Food Diaries (pages 13-15)
3. Regular Eating and Portion Control (page 16)
4. Planning, Preparation, and Practice (page 17)
5. Weekly Weighing (page 18)
6. Mindful Eating (page 19-20)
7. Exercise (pages 21-22)
 - a. Moderate-Intensity Exercise
 - b. Lifestyle Physical Activity
 - c. Resistance Training
8. Stress Management and Healthy Mindset (pages 23-28)
9. Self-Care and Good Sleep Habits (pages 29-30)
10. Ask for the Support You Need (page 33)
11. Stimulus Control (pages 34-37)
12. Lapse/Relapse Management (page 38)

Week 1

1. Rationale for Behavioral Health Requirement

Bariatric surgery is a powerful tool to promote weight loss, but it is only a tool. Good tools do not guarantee success without knowledge and skills.

There is a honeymoon period after surgery when many patients have no appetite and little interest in food. It is easy to become complacent and start thinking bariatric surgery will keep doing the work for you. Sadly, the honeymoon usually lasts no more than a year, and patients can and often do gain back much or even all of the weight they lost.

Behavior is a key predictor of success or failure after surgery.

2. What is the Best Way to Lose Weight? (from Journal of the American Medical Association, 2021)

a. Limit Daily Caloric Intake

- 1200 to 1500 calories per day for women
- 1500 to 1800 calories per day for men
- Choose a balanced diet (50% colorful vegetables and fruits, 25% whole grains, 25% healthy protein)
- Drink plenty of water and avoid sugary drinks (soda, punch, juice)

b. Increase Physical Activity

- At least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity exercise like walking

c. Set Diet and Exercise Related Goals

3. SMART Goals

- a. Specific
 - i. What exactly do I want to accomplish?
 - ii. How will I do it?
 - iii. Where and when will it happen?
 - iv. What resources are needed?
 - v. What are the barriers?
- b. Measurable
 - i. How much?
 - ii. How many?
 - iii. How often?
 - iv. How will I know I've been successful?
- c. Achievable but Ambitious
 - i. Is it possible?
 - ii. Can I make this happen through my behavior?
 - iii. Is it challenging enough to be meaningful?
- d. Relevant
 - i. Why is this goal important?
 - ii. Is this goal consistent with my values?
 - iii. Is this the right time?
 - iv. Do the potential benefits outweigh the sacrifices?
 - v. Do I have the resources to achieve it (money, support, time)?
- e. Time Bound
 - i. When do I want or need to have this goal accomplished?
 - ii. What can I expect to achieve in 6 months? 6 weeks? 1 week? 1 day?
 - iii. What can I do right now to start working toward the goal?

4. Outcome Goals vs. Process Goals

- a. Outcome Goals: Your desired end result.
 - i. Examples include: lose 100 lbs, get my BMI below 30, control my diabetes without medication
- b. Process Goals: The voluntary behaviors, skills and strategies needed to achieve the outcome goal.
 - i. Examples include: eat around 1500 calories daily, walk for 30 minutes 5 times a week, eat 3 servings of vegetables daily

5. Tips for Achieving Your Goals (from *The Weight Escape* by Ciarrochi, Bailey, and Harris, 2014)
- Write them down.
 - Check in regularly
 - Celebrate small wins along the way
 - Remember your “Why?” Why are you doing this?

SKILL #1: GOAL TRACKING

Each week at the end of the group meeting, you will write down 3-4 goals to work to achieve before the next group meeting.

These goals should all be **Process Goals**.

They should SMART.

Write down your goals on a **Goal Tracking Sheet** like the one available on the Reliant Behavioral Health web site (illustrated on page 12).

At the end of each day, review your goals and assess your progress. Develop a system for tracking progress. For instance, you could enter a star for full success, a check mark for partial success, a minus sign or leave the box blank for no progress.

Goal Tracking Sheet

Outcome Goal : _____lose 4 lbs this month_____

My process goals For this Week are: Week of ____/____/____	Goal 1: Write down everything I eat and drink every day this week.						
	Goal 2: Walk for 20 minutes four days this week (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday)						
	Goal 3: Drink 64 ounces of water daily						
	Goal 4: 						
DAY	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Goal 1	100%	60%	100%	Forgot all day 😞	100%	100%	100%
Goal 2	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	NA
Goal 3	32 oz	64 oz	64 oz	64 oz	48 oz	100 oz!	60 oz.
Goal 4							

SKILL #2: FOOD DIARIES

Why Do It:

Research suggests keeping track of what you eat, when, and how much is one of the most powerful predictors of successful weight loss and long-term maintenance of weight loss.

Reducing caloric intake is necessary to lose weight. It is very hard to reduce caloric intake without keeping track of what you eat. Your nutritionist may recommend specific protein, carbohydrate, and/or fiber guidelines, and tracking is necessary to follow those guidelines.

Writing down everything you eat can change your eating behavior by making you more aware of your eating and discouraging mindless eating.

How to Do It:

For most people, smartphone apps are the easiest and most effective way to keep food diaries. The apps will automatically enter calories and other nutrients when you enter a food and the amount. A notebook works better for some people and allows you to add customized notes. The key is finding a strategy you will use consistently. A list of popular apps is on page 14. A sample written food record is on page 15.

Enter or write down everything you eat or drink that contains calories or nutrition, even if it you have just a bite or sip.

You will have to measure or weigh some foods in order to enter accurate quantities. If you don't have a set of measuring cups and spoons and a food scale, purchase those items.

Enter or write down your foods and beverages immediately after you eat or drink them.

Better yet, enter them before, so you can relax and enjoy your meal or snack. If you forget to enter something, do it as soon as you remember. **Do not** wait until the end of the day, but if you forget the whole day, entering foods later is better than not entering them at all.

Food Tracking Apps

- MyPlate
- MyNetDiary
- Lose It!
- MyFitnessPal
- SparkPeople
- Baritastic
- Carb Manager
- Weight Watchers

Sample Daily Food Record

Day/Date:

Time	Food and Liquid Consumed	Amount	Protein/Calories/Fiber	Thoughts/Feelings	Triggers
6:30 am	Oatmeal Banana Milk Hard boiled egg	½ cup Half 2 T 1 Lg	150 calories 100 calories 18 calories 90 calories	Hungry, looking forward to the day	It's time to eat
11:30 am	Birthday cake	1 large slice	400 calories	I can't resist!	Birthday party at work Forgot to eat my healthy snack at 10 so I was hungry
12:30 pm	Grilled chicken breast Lettuce Tomatoes Cucumbers Olive oil	3 ounces 2 cups 1 med. ½ small ½ T	126 calories 20 calories 26 calories 8 calories 60 calories	Too bad I ate that cake, but I'll eat healthy for the rest of the day. I'm not very hungry yet, but I need to get back on track.	It's time to eat.
3 pm	Peach Cottage cheese	1 med. ½ cup	38 calories 111 calories		Reminder on phone
6:30 pm	Baked salmon Steamed broccoli Brown rice Strawberries, sliced	3 ounces 1 cup ½ cup 1 cup	177 calories 31 calories 108 calories 54 calories	Happy to be eating with family.	Dinner time

Total Calories: 1517

Week 2

SKILL #3: REGULAR EATING AND PORTION CONTROL

Why Do It:

Going too long without eating increases **ghrelin**, the hunger hormone. Ghrelin stimulates appetite, increases food intake and promotes fat storage. Ghrelin levels go up between meals and increase the longer we go without eating. People who skip meals tend to eat large amounts when they do eat, because of increased ghrelin levels, and the calories are more likely to be stored as fat to protect against future starvation. This is why skipping meals makes it hard to lose weight.

Eating several **Mini Meals** daily at 3-5 hour intervals will enhance calorie burning and prevent the build-up of ghrelin and hunger/deprivation.

Modern life disrupts the natural process of eating in response to hunger. We end up eating when we can or confusing other feelings (boredom, loneliness, joy, fatigue) with hunger. Frequent dieting and overeating disrupt hunger and fullness cues.

Early in your weight loss program and after bariatric surgery, you can't depend on hunger to tell you when to eat or not eat. Instead, you must set up an eating schedule. Eating by the clock reduces the power of other non-hunger cues for eating. Over time, normal hunger cues will be established or re-established.

How to Do It:

Eat 3 small meals and 2 snacks (or 5 mini-meals) every day.

Eat breakfast shortly after getting up. You don't have to eat traditional breakfast foods if you don't like them, but it's important to eat something and include protein if possible.

Eat at regular intervals, every 3 to 5 hours. Don't graze between meals and snacks.

If you are prone to night eating, you may want to have a small snack or part of your dinner within an hour of bedtime.

SKILL #4: PLAN, PREPARE, AND PRACTICE

Why Do It:

Establishing new lifelong habits is crucial to weight loss and maintenance of weight loss. If habits like keeping food diaries and eating five times a day are new to you, they will probably be difficult at first, and you may have to make some changes to other parts of your lifestyle. **Planning, preparation, and practice** are crucial when establishing new habits. By planning and preparing meals and snacks in advance, you make sure you always have something healthy to eat. Planning can help you anticipate challenges and be ready for them. Practice builds a new habit. The more times we repeat a behavior, the more automatic it becomes.

How to Do It:

Shop with a list.

Plan ahead to fit new eating habits into your schedule.

Prepare meals and snacks in advance.

Pack meals and snacks for work or outings.

Pre-packing meals can improve portion control, even if you eat them at home.

Plan and schedule time to exercise.

Prepare for your workout by taking out your athletic clothes and sneakers in advance. If you go to the gym, pack your workout bag the night before.

Put exercise, shopping, and meal planning on your to-do list.

Practice, practice, practice.

When you fail, don't give up. Revise your plan if necessary. Keep trying until you succeed.

SKILL #5: WEIGH YOURSELF ONCE A WEEK

Why Do It:

Research shows people who successfully lose weight and keep it off weigh themselves regularly and keep track of their weight. Knowing how much you weigh allows you to know whether your weight loss strategies are working. When losing weight, weighing yourself once a week works best for most people. Weighing in more frequently can be frustrating, since weight loss should be gradual, and minor fluctuations can seem more important than they are. Weighing in less frequently can prevent you from identifying successes or setbacks and increases weight related anxiety.

How to Do It:

If you don't own a scale, get one. Accurate scales in the \$20-\$30 range can be purchased at most department and discount stores, and usually provide accurate readings up to 300 or 400 lbs (check the package or listing). High capacity scales that can accurately read up to 700 lbs are available from Amazon and other vendors. They can be more expensive (\$75-\$100) but are a worthwhile investment for your health.

Pick a day of the week that works best for you, and always weigh yourself on that day.

Always weigh yourself shortly after you wake up and before you eat or drink anything.

Empty your bladder before you weigh in.

Wear similar clothing (or no clothing) whenever you weigh yourself.

Keep a record of your weekly weight in your food diary.

SKILL #6: MINDFUL EATING

Why Do It:

It takes about 20 minutes from the time you start eating for your brain to recognize that your stomach is full. That means if you eat quickly, you may want more food even after you've had enough to satisfy your physical hunger. Eating slowly allows you time to feel full sooner and therefore eat less. Research suggests people who slow down their eating consume fewer calories. If you have bariatric surgery, it is particularly important to eat slowly. If you eat too fast, you may eat too much. In the short term, you may feel sick. In the long term, people who eat too quickly are less successful losing weight and keeping it off after bariatric surgery.

Eating slowly and paying attention to your food can also increase your enjoyment. You may find you are getting the same amount of pleasure from a smaller quantity of food when you take the time to enjoy each bite.

How to Do It:

Before you eat anything, ask yourself, "Why am I eating this?" If you're eating for physical hunger and nutrition or because it's time to eat, then go ahead. If you're eating for another reason, stop and think again, "Is it worth it? Will eating this make my life better?" Make it a habit to pause before eating anything.

While eating, give your food your full attention. Don't multitask and eat away from distractions.

Give yourself enough time to eat slowly. Aim to take 20 minutes to eat a meal or snack.

Every so often, stop to notice feelings of hunger and fullness.

Choose foods that are healthy, but make sure the tastes and textures are pleasing to you.

While eating, experience the food with all your senses.

Become knowledgeable about the food you eat. Try different recipes. Experiment with new foods you haven't tried.

Don't judge yourself while eating. Every time you find yourself eating mindlessly or too quickly, just remind yourself to go back to mindful eating. It takes time and practice.

SKILL #7: EXERCISE

Why Do It:

Exercise burns calories, and research shows people who maintain weight loss long-term exercise regularly. The Weight Control Registry at Brown University surveys people who have successfully maintained weight loss for at least a year. The majority of people in the Registry exercise for 1 hour a day on average! While you may be able to lose weight without exercising much, your chance of keeping the weight off is very low if you remain inactive. Patients who exercise regularly before bariatric surgery are likely to have fewer surgical complications and recover more quickly.

Exercise has other benefits, even if you don't lose weight. These include:

- Clearer thinking
- Improved mood
- Better sleep
- More energy
- Improved physical functioning
- Protection from illness
- Increased fun
- More discipline
- Slower aging
- Improved appearance

How to Do It:

First, just **show up for exercise**. Make a commitment to move daily and do it, even if you only have five minutes! Just do something physical. Once you start exercising, you'll gradually find yourself exercising more.

Once you have established the habit of moving daily, make it your goal to increase three kinds of exercise.

1. Moderate-intensity exercise equivalent to brisk walking (aim for at least 30 minutes a day, more if possible)
 - a. Burns calories
 - b. Increase cardiovascular health and stamina
 - c. Can improve mental health and focus

2. Lifestyle physical activity (park at the far end of the parking lot and walk, take the stairs instead of the elevator, use the bathroom farthest from your office)
 - a. Maintains flexibility and stamina
 - b. Helps avoid risks associated with prolonged sitting
 - c. Burns additional calories
 - d. Builds healthy breaks into your day
3. Resistance training (strength training, lifting weights, Pilates)
 - a. Increases strength
 - b. Reduces risk of physical injury
 - c. May increase base metabolism

Week 3

Stress and emotions can cause us to overeat or stop engaging in other activities that promote weight loss, such as exercise, meal planning, or food diaries. Having strategies for managing stress and emotions can increase your odds of successfully losing weight and keeping the weight off after surgery.

SKILL #8: STRESS MANAGEMENT AND HEALTHY MINDSET

Why Do It:

When we feel stress, it usually means we are facing a problem that needs to be solved. In moderate doses, mental stress is probably healthy, just like stressing a muscle makes it stronger. When stress gets overwhelming, however, it can lead to problems like overeating, eating unhealthy foods, or losing the ability to make progress toward goals. It is good to have a strategy for coping effectively with stress.

Many people who struggle to lose weight report emotional eating. Eating comfort foods can make us feel better for a while, but it's usually not a good long term solution, particularly when you are trying to lose weight. Cognitive behavior therapy helps us notice styles of thinking that lead to negative moods and loss of confidence and motivation. Identifying those negative thinking styles and challenging them can improve mood and help you stay motivated and confident.

How to Do It:

See the 4-Step Approach to Stress Management and Problem Solving (page 24) and information on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (pages 25-27).

The Four Step Approach to Stress Management and Problem Solving

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. STOP | When you become aware of a stressful situation, say “Stop” to yourself. Simply saying “Stop” can help break your pattern of automatic response and interrupt the Negative Stress Cycle. Try saying it out loud or picturing a Stop sign. |
| 2. BREATHE | After you “Stop”, breathe deeply and release physical tension. |
| 3. REFLECT | Focus your energies on the problem at hand. Ask yourself some questions: Is this a situation that I have control over? Is this a situation I can change? What are my automatic thoughts? Am I overreacting? Am I jumping to conclusions? |
| 4. CHOOSE | Decide how you can best deal with this situation. What is the healthiest response? |

FOUR STEP APPROACH LOG:

What happened when you tried The Four-Step Approach?

Situation: _____

Stop: _____

Breathe: _____

Reflect: _____

Choose: _____

Situations

These are the people, places, and things around you. People often think they feel certain moods or emotions or behave in a certain way *because* of what is happening around them, but this is only one part of the complete picture.

Thoughts

No situation affects you until you *interpret* it. How you think about what is happening has a powerful influence on how you feel about it and how you respond. Different thoughts or interpretations lead to different feelings and behaviors.

Feelings

Feelings may include being happy, excited, agitated, angry, upset, afraid, and so on. Feelings can also include physical sensations (e.g., rapid heartbeat, upset stomach)

Behaviors

These are the things we do. Our behaviors are guided by our thoughts and feelings. Sometimes it feels like we act automatically in response to situations, but in almost all cases, thoughts and/or feelings occur before behaviors.

Negative Automatic Thoughts

The day started off badly...the whole day is ruined.

I don't have time to go to the gym, and that will ruin my whole day, maybe even the whole week.

I don't have any control over this situation.

I didn't sleep well last night, so it's going to be a bad day.

This situation makes it impossible for me to lose weight.

I'll never finish everything I have to do today.

I have to finish everything today.

What did I do to deserve this?

Being hungry and trying not to overeat will make the evening unbearable.

If I don't remember to keep food records every day, I may as well give up. It's just too hard for me. I'm a failure.

Challenge/Alternative Thoughts

One event doesn't determine the day. I can get back on track right away.

I have no evidence the day will be ruined. I may even find a few minutes to walk or do some exercise at home. If I miss my workout today, I can still exercise tomorrow.

There are some things I can do. Let me see which strategy I can use.

Maybe it won't be so bad. Maybe I'll just feel a little tired but still have a good day.

I may not be able to follow all the recommendations, but there are a few I can continue even during a difficult situation.

I've accomplished quite a lot. I don't need to finish everything today. I can continue tomorrow.

No, I don't have to finish everything today.

I didn't do anything to deserve this. Sometimes bad things happen to good people.

If I can keep calm and focus on my Why, the evening will be ok. There are other ways to enjoy myself besides eating.

I'm not a failure just because I don't succeed right away. I have succeeded at learning new things before. Learning new habits takes time and practice.

Five Column Thought Record

Situation	Thoughts	Feelings/ Behaviors	Negative Automatic Thought?	Challenge What are the alternatives to your negative thoughts?

Other Alternatives to Emotional Eating:

When you experience a negative feeling...

- Notice the feeling (“I feel sad.”)
- Allow the feeling (don’t try to avoid it)
- Breathe into the feeling (imagine your breath surrounding the sadness)
- Describe the feeling (“It feels like my heart is heavy.”)
- Normalize the feeling (“It’s normal to feel sad about this loss.”)

You can feel discomfort and unpleasant feelings AND do what is important to you.

SKILL #9: SELF CARE AND GOOD SLEEP HABITS

Why Do It:

Losing weight, eating healthy foods, and exercising are all forms of self-care, but it's important to take care of yourself in other ways when trying to lose weight. Often losing weight involves giving up habits you used to find rewarding or adding some that aren't very rewarding. It's important to give yourself other rewards so you can stay motivated.

Sometimes people feel guilty taking care of themselves and feel they should put other people first, but taking care of yourself gives you the health and vitality to be there for others. If you travel by airplane, the flight attendants always say to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others. Think of self-care as your oxygen mask.

Getting enough sleep is one of the most important forms of self-care. Unfortunately, inadequate sleep is very common for busy people. Some studies suggest people who get less sleep are at increased risk for overweight and obesity. If you have trouble sleeping, consider talking to your primary care provider. If you wake up many times during the night, you may have sleep apnea. If you have trouble falling asleep, attention to sleep hygiene may help (pages 31-32).

How to Do It:

There are many ways to practice self-care. What works for one person may not work for someone else. The important thing is to make self-care a priority in your schedule. This could mean blocking off time to work out or spending some time unplugged from technology once in a while. Here are some ideas for self-care:

Exercise

Research shows that exercise can relieve stress, improve your mood, and help you sleep better, in addition improving health and helping you achieve your weight loss goals.

Hobbies

Do something you love: Carve out time for your passions and hobbies, whether that's hiking, crafting, dancing, reading for fun, etc. Hobbies can provide you an outlet for managing stress and can increase happiness levels.

Friends

Spend time with friends and family: Research shows that spending time with loved ones contributes to happiness. Take time to connect with a friend or a family member.

Self-compassion

Self-compassion is treating yourself like you would treat your best friend. Talk to yourself the way you would talk to someone you care about. Be kind to yourself.

Mindfulness

Being in the present moment can help to reduce stress. Practice mindfulness by noticing your five senses; what do you see, hear, taste, feel, and smell right now?

Relaxation

Try listening to some recorded relaxation exercises like the ones on this website offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs:

https://www.columbiamo.va.gov/services/Relaxation_Recordings.asp

Practice Gratitude

One simple way to practice gratitude is by writing down 3 things you're grateful for every day. Remembering to find things, experiences and people in your life that make you feel grateful can have powerful effects on your mood.

Unplug from technology

Sometimes the best way to recharge is to take a break from technology. Research shows that downtime replenishes attention and motivation, encourages productivity and creativity.

Journaling

Writing can help you process your feelings, ignite creativity centers in the brain, and help you be in the present moment. Take a few minutes each day to journal.

Practice meditation

Taking a few minutes to clear your mind of various stressors can be a great way to practice self-care. Research shows that meditation can improve your focus, immunity, and overall mental well-being.

Spend time in nature

Research shows that spending time in nature can have remarkable benefits to human health.

Adapted from University of Texas at Austin, Counseling and Mental Health Center: <https://cmbc.utexas.edu/selfcare.html>

Sleep Hygiene

1. Never try to sleep. It only makes things worse. If you feel anxious in bed, get up. If you don't fall asleep within 30 minutes, get up. Get a drink of water, go to the bathroom, do a relaxation technique or read a book. When you start to feel sleepy, then go back to bed.
2. Put yourself on a schedule where you get up and go to bed at the same time each day. Also, restrict your time in bed to no more than 1 hour longer than the actual time you sleep.
3. Use relaxation techniques to reduce your stress level during the day. This will make it easier to unwind when it's time to relax and go to sleep.
4. Caffeine is a stimulant and should be discontinued 8 hours before bedtime. Also, try switching to decaffeinated during the day.
5. Nicotine is also a stimulant and should be avoided near bedtime and upon night wakening. Instead, try a relaxing cup of herbal tea or warm milk.
6. Alcohol is a depressant; although it may facilitate sleep onset, it causes awakenings later in the night.
7. A light snack may be sleep-inducing, but a heavy meal too close to bedtime interferes with sleep. A light carbohydrate snack can help increase the production of serotonin in the brain, which in turn helps to bring on sleep. Also, avoid eating foods with high sugar content too close to bedtime. If you minimize fluid intake during the last few hours before bedtime, you will lessen the likelihood of waking up from a full bladder.
8. Do not exercise vigorously within 3-4 hours of bedtime; regular exercise in the late morning or early afternoon may deepen sleep.
9. Minimize noise, light and excessive temperature during the sleep period with earplugs, or an electric blanket/air conditioner.
10. Avoid watching violent TV shows, movies or the news within the few hours before going to bed. Try doing a relaxation exercise, reading a good book, or listening to relaxing music.

11. Use the bed for sleeping. Don't watch TV or do work in bed. Make it a place associated with sleep and relaxation.
12. Avoid taking extended naps during the day. Instead, try taking a 30-minute power nap or doing a relaxation exercise. Taking longer naps during the day may impede your ability to sleep at night.
13. Use the last two hours before bedtime as a time to relax. Take time earlier in the evening to plan your next day's activities, make phone calls and conduct business.
14. Watch your expectations:
 - Not everyone needs 8 hours of sleep per night.
 - Most of the night is not spent in deep sleep.
 - Moderate sleep loss has no effect on performance the next day.
15. In most cases, medication is not the answer to insomnia. Always check with your physician before starting, stopping or altering your medication. Sleep disturbances may sometimes be a symptom of something else. Be sure to check with your physician if you have experienced changes in your sleep pattern. Examine your stress level and lifestyle to see if you need to make changes to improve your sleep.

From: Insomnia: Psychological Assessment and Management by Charles M. Morin. New York: Guilford Press, 1993.

The Wellness Book: The Comprehensive Guide to Maintaining Health and Treating Stress-Related Illness by H. Benson and E. Stuart, 1992

Week 4

SKILL #10: ASK FOR THE SUPPORT YOU NEED

Why Do It:

Losing weight and keeping it off is challenging under the best of circumstances. Family, friends and other important people in your life can make it more or less challenging. When family members support your weight loss by joining you in healthy eating and exercise or giving you the time you need to take care of yourself, you will likely find the process a lot easier. On the other hand, lack of support can be a barrier to weight loss. If family members insist on having high calorie foods or tempt you to overeat, your likelihood of success may go down. Often other people want to be supportive, but do not know how to help. Sometimes, unfortunately, other people can be selfish and unwilling to help you lose weight. It is important to ask for the support you need and set limits with people who are unsupportive.

How To Do It:

Start by talking to the important people in your life. Explain why you want to lose weight and why it is important to you. Discuss specific ways others can be helpful. Often people try to be helpful in ways that end up feeling intrusive or nagging. Be clear about what you would find helpful. For example: “You can help me by not offering me snacks after dinner, but if I have a small snack, don’t criticize me.”

Once you agree on how others can be helpful, keep to the agreement yourself and express appreciation for their help.

Find ways to combine weight loss and good times with family and friends. Examples could be scheduling time to walk with your spouse or partner, teaching your kids to prepare healthy foods, or playing active games with grandchildren. When getting together with friends, suggest going for a walk together instead of catching up over drinks or snacks.

If you are the primary cook in the household, serve healthy foods without apology. It may turn out that people like them. Remember that you are helping loved ones when you serve them healthy foods. This is particularly important for children. Allowing children to eat only tasty processed foods like chicken nuggets, hot dogs, or mac and cheese, increases their risk for developing obesity and other health problems.

SKILL #11: STIMULUS CONTROL

Starting and building new habits is challenging, but maintaining them is even harder.

Why Do It:

If you can structure your environment to make new habits easier, you will more likely be successful building and maintaining them. Triggers are cues in the environment or internal states that make us more or less likely to do something. For instance, you may have specific triggers that lead you to overeat or stop exercising. If you learn what your specific triggers are, you can figure out ways to control them and replace them with triggers for healthy behaviors.

How to Do It:

Identify your triggers. There are several types of triggers:

- Social (friends or family, social gatherings)
- Environmental (danger foods in the home or at work)
- Emotional (lonely, sad, stressed, bored)
- Cognitive (thoughts like, “I deserve a treat,” “Comfort food will make me feel better.”)
- Physical (hungry, tired, nauseated)

Eliminate or modify triggers to break their connection with overeating. There are several strategies for dealing with and changing triggers:

- Remove danger foods from the home or store in an inconvenient location
- Suggest social activities that don’t involve eating
- Leave a social occasion early if temptation is too strong
- Have a small healthy snack before going out socially to reduce hunger
- Plan ahead for challenging situations (see pages 34-35 for suggestions)
- Distract yourself with enjoyable activities or call someone for support when you feel tempted to snack (see page 36 for examples)
- Lay out your exercise clothes or pack a gym bag in advance
- Keep exercise clothes and shoes in your car to be ready for opportunities
- Remind yourself of goals, put up signs or posters near fridge, TV or in your car
- Try urge surfing: <https://www.dartmouth-hitchcock.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/urge-surfing.pdf?msclkid=e1c4ead1a54411ecbd1d2a0c3543f818>

Dealing with Challenging Situations: Live your life fully without compromising your weight loss plan.

1. Restaurants

- a. Plan! Research menu ahead of time and choose lower calorie options. Have a general idea what you'll order in advance.
- b. Have an idea where fats and calories are commonly hidden.
- c. Avoid buffets.
- d. Skip the bread basket.
- e. Skip appetizers (or make appetizers your entrée).
- f. Skip fried foods.
- g. Drink water 30 minutes ahead of dinner.
- h. Cut your entrée in half and have the other half wrapped up for a future meal.
- i. Salad dressing on the side. Dip your fork rather than pouring dressing.
- j. Say no to dessert or share with others at the table.
- k. Ask companions not to nag or tempt.

2. Weekends

- a. Plan! Lack of structure makes planning even more important on weekends. You may need to have multiple alternative plans depending what comes up.
- b. Schedule in non-food rewards.
- c. Don't skip meals
 - i. Pack mini meals when you run errands
 - ii. Have breakfast soon after getting up

3. Vacations/Holidays

- a. Include non-food pleasures.
 - i. Picture the vacation, what do you want to remember?
 - ii. Outings/activities
- b. Include family/friends in discussion of goals and vacation plans.
 - i. How can this vacation be different?
 - ii. How can **we** make healthy food choices?
 - iii. What would you like them to do or say to be supportive?
- c. Plan, but be realistic and expect plans to change

- i. Continue food logs.
 - ii. Weigh weekly
 - iii. Eat something special in moderation
 - iv. Focus on maintenance rather than loss
- d. Avoid alcohol
 - i. Impairs self-control
 - ii. Adds calories
- e. Be active
- f. Prepare for comments
 - i. Family and friends who haven't seen you in a while may comment on your weight loss.
 - ii. Some comments may be negative. Some may be positive but intrusive. How can you minimize the stress caused by insensitive comments?

A Menu of Possibly Pleasurable Activities

- Take a drive to see something new.
- Relax and read a newspaper or magazine.
- Help your child with homework.
- Plant something to watch it grow.
- Go for a walk.
- Take a nap.
- Build something from wood.
- Feed the birds or ducks.
- Hang a hummingbird feeder.
- Go for a jog or run.
- Get up early to watch the sunrise.
- Walk a dog.
- Play frisbee,
- Sew something.
- Play golf.
- Read poetry.
- Start a memory box.
- Call a friend who makes you laugh.
- Enjoy the quiet of an early morning.
- Grow (or shave off) a beard or mustache.
- Have a relaxed breakfast.
- Compliment someone
- Make arts and crafts.
- Put on makeup or polish nails.
- Ride a motorcycle.
- Hum or sing.
- Add an item to your collection.
- Watch a funny movie.
- Read a book you've heard about.
- Listen to your favorite music.
- Lie on the grass.
- Cook a favorite healthy meal.
- Visit an old friend.
- Pray.
- Walk along the water.
- Walk or ride on a bicycle path.
- Shop online
- Find a place for a moment of solitude.
- Play a card or board game.
- Wash and wax your car.
- Take a class online.
- Play a musical instrument (or learn to).
- Look at maps for places to visit.
- Meditate.
- Send a care package to a student.
- Call someone special in your family.
- Write to an old friend.
- Enter a contest.
- Paint a room.
- Research your family history.
- Lie under a tree and watch the sky.

SKILL #12: LAPSE/RELAPSE MANAGEMENT

Why Do It:

Even the most successful person fails from time to time. Failing sometimes is part of being human. The key to long-term success is getting up and trying again every time you fail. In fact, trying again whenever you fail may be the most important skill of all.

Relapse happens when you stop working toward a goal. In weight loss, it could mean a return to overeating, eating unhealthy foods, giving up on an exercise program, or giving up on keeping food diaries. A lapse is smaller, more temporary, or the first step in a relapse. If you get back on track quickly after a lapse, it's unlikely to take you too far away from your goals. An example of a lapse would be having an unplanned dessert, skipping a workout, or not keeping food diaries for a day. Some lapses are longer than others, but what sets them apart from relapses, is that you keep your eye on your goal and eventually go back to pursuing it. A relapse usually involves giving up on your goal, at least for a while.

How To Do It:

Do

- Acknowledge what happened.
- Ask yourself: What caused this lapse? (Examples: stress, being too hungry, boredom, being busy)
- Remember: this happens to everyone. No one is perfect. You have tools to move on from this. You can come back from a lapse or even a relapse.
- Write down what happened.
- Forgive yourself.
- Take a moment to re-evaluate your goals and recommit to them.
- If weight loss is still your goal, get back on track right away.

Don't

- Don't pretend it didn't happen
- Don't engage in negative self-talk or put yourself down. Don't blame others.
- Don't tell yourself: "This day is shot, I'll start again tomorrow."
- Don't wait a week, a day, or even an hour to start over.