

How Behavioral Health Helps with Weight Management

Losing weight isn't just about food and exercise; it's also about how we think, feel, and handle challenges. Research shows that people who include behavioral strategies in their weight loss plan are more likely to lose weight and keep it off (Wing & Phelan, 2005; Fabricatore et al., 2011; Look AHEAD Research Group, 2014).

How Behavioral Health Helps:

- Understanding Triggers
- Learn how emotions like stress, boredom, or sadness affect eating and activity.
- Set Realistic Goals
- Break big goals into small, achievable steps to build confidence.
- Stay Motivated
- Work on positive thinking and problem-solving to keep moving forward.
- Manage Stress
- Practice skills like deep breathing, relaxation, or journaling to avoid turning to food.
- Build Healthy Habits
- Use tools like food/activity logs, reminders, and routines to make healthy choices easier

Some Simple Strategies to Manage Your Eating:

How often have you over-eaten or eaten unhealthy foods due to eating effortlessly in an unaware and mindless manner? Have you ever noticed that when you're done eating, you feel too full because you ate too much? This happens when we do not pay attention to eating, typically because we are doing something else at the same time, like watching television, talking with others, or working. If you increase your awareness—or *mindfulness*—of eating, however, you can reduce your caloric intake and not feel so full.

Mindfulness is a way of observing your experiences and being in touch with your actions, thoughts, and feelings. Mindful eating teaches you to pay attention to your body's signals that you are full and about what foods to eat. The goal of mindful eating is to understand your hunger and your body and mind's reaction to food and the process of eating. Try this activity:

Mindful eating

To start, move through the meal slowly. Take your time performing every action and notice what your experience is as you go through it.

- When you lift a fork or cut your meat, note what that is like for you.
- As you place a bite of food in your mouth and chew it, place your fork on the table and think about the flavors and the texture of the food.
- Is it enjoyable or repulsive? Don't get hung up on judging it. Just notice it.

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- Do you find that particular thoughts or feelings come up during the course of the meal? If so, simply note those as well.

Developing Weight Goals

Setting SMART goals for weight loss is the first and most important step for managing your weight. Good goals have several qualities:

- **Specific:** Goals should not be too general or vague, since this makes it hard for us to know when we have accomplished them. For example, “I want to lose 20 pounds” is a better goal than “I want to lose weight.”
- **Measurable:** Goals should be set in a way that can easily and meaningfully be measured. For example, “I want to look better” is not easily measured, but “I want a 34-inch waist” is easily measured.
- **Attainable:** Goals should be something you are motivated to achieve. For example, if improving your PT score is more important to you than your overall weight, then your goal should not be to lose weight.
- **Realistic:** Goals should be something you can accomplish. For example, setting a goal to run a marathon next month when you struggle to run 2 miles now is not a realistic goal.
- **Timely:** Goals should have a time frame built into them to hold you accountable. You’re more likely to work towards a goal if you give yourself a deadline.

Setting a SMART Weight Management Goal	
Specific: Where will you do it? With whom will you do it? How often will you do it?	
Measurable: How much? How many?	
Attainable: What is most important to you? What do you hope to accomplish?	
Realistic: Are you able to do it? What can you do right now? How easy will this be to maintain?	

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Timely: When do you want to accomplish this? Do you have a deadline?	
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Now that you have considered the necessary components for a SMART goal, write down your weight management goal below:

Other tips for accomplishing this goal:

1. Hang this goal up where you can see it regularly so you can remind yourself what you're working towards.
2. Tell others about it. Ask them to help you stay accountable and support you.
3. Ask your doctor for advice or tips on reaching this goal.
4. Try this goal out for two weeks. At the end of two weeks, see if it's a goal that will work for you. If not, change it so it will work better.
5. Once you have accomplished this goal, set another SMART goal right away.
6. Remember to pace yourself. Change will not happen all at once, but will slowly build up over time. Be patient.