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Overcoming Disordered Eating

Welcome!



Information Pack B

Welcome to the CCI Information Packs on Overcoming Disordered Eating. If you're reading this, it's likely that you're interested in tackling problems to do with controlling your eating, weight or shape. These Information Packs are designed for you.

Each Pack is organised into modules and includes information, worksheets, and suggested exercises or activities. We recommend that you complete the Information Packs (and their modules) in sequence, finishing Pack A before moving on to Pack B.

- **Pack A (Take Charge...Initiate Change)** provides information about disordered eating and offers strategies to help you start changing the *behaviours* associated with your disordered eating and weight control habits.
- **Pack B (In Charge...Mindset Matters)** offers you strategies to change your disordered *thoughts* about eating and weight control.

The modules in Pack B specifically address thought processes and mindsets in people with disordered eating. If, after having read the modules, you would like to know more about the relationship between thoughts and feelings, you can go to our website (www.cci.health.wa.gov.au) and refer to the Information Pack on depression, "Back from the Bluez", especially Module 3, "The Thinking-Feeling Connection".

We want to extend a warm welcome to you on this journey towards learning and changing. It's important to know that overcoming disordered eating may take some time, especially if you've had your problems for several years. Be patient - this isn't a race! It's better to work through the modules thoroughly and keep practicing the strategies we introduce, until you feel confident and ready to tackle another problematic aspect of your eating and weight control habits. This way you'll be able to consolidate your changes.

Remind yourself not to give up, but to keep going. Persevere and keep at it!



Overcoming Disordered Eating

Information Pack B

In Charge ... Mindset Matters

Module 1

Over-evaluation of Body Shape & Weight

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

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

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

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



Introduction

Welcome to Information Pack B. In Information Pack A we described what keeps eating disorders going and discussed self-monitoring; regular eating and regular weighing; binge eating, purging and driven exercise; and dietary rules. You learned strategies to change your disordered eating and weight control *behaviours*. You had the opportunity to assess your progress and identify any roadblocks that might be getting in the way. If you haven't read Information Pack A, we suggest you do so now. These Information Packs were designed to be read in order, with each module building upon one another in order to offer you a comprehensive understanding of disordered eating and weight control measures, and strategies for change.

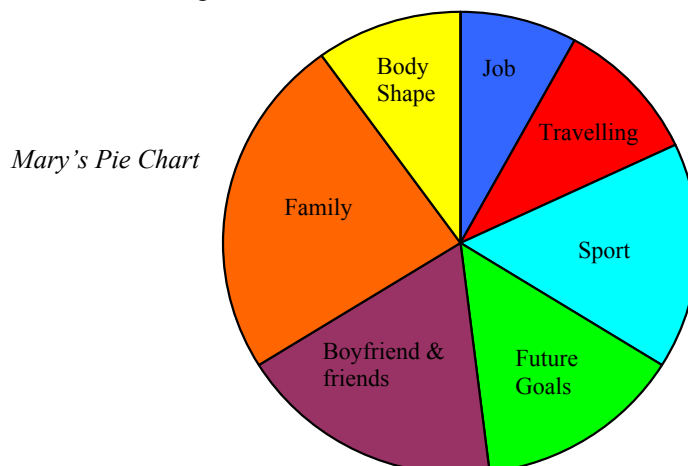
In this Information Pack we will tackle the *thoughts*, or cognitions, that maintain disordered eating. Initially we will focus on your thought patterns. You may remember in the first module of Information Pack A we introduced the notion of taking a “helicopter view” of yourself. By completing food logs, you've started to become more aware of your thoughts and feelings. We want you to keep up that awareness so that you can take a step back and ask yourself: “What's going on?...What do I need to do?”

In this module we will explore in more detail how people with eating disorders place an unusually high value on controlling their eating, weight and/or shape, and how they judge their self-worth accordingly. We will show how this leads to an over-evaluation of control over eating, weight and/or shape, and how this preoccupation and other factors keep the disordered eating going. We will identify ways of addressing these issues, both the over-evaluation of weight/shape/control and its consequences.

Judging Self-Worth

We have discussed how people with eating disorders are overly concerned with controlling their eating, weight, shape. How does this affect the way they judge themselves and their self-worth? Most people evaluate their self-worth (or self-esteem) based on a variety of things, such as their relationships, achievements at school or work, hobbies, leisure activities, and other abilities. They might evaluate how happy they are based on how well important things in their life are going. Let's take the example of Mary.

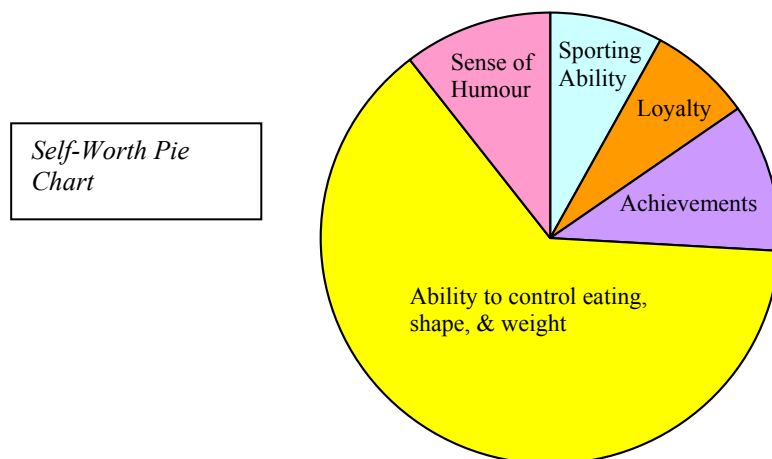
Mary, 21, works as a clerk for a telephone company. She shares a unit with a friend and has been with her boyfriend, Jack, for 2 years. Mary and Jack both play netball. Mary loves to play soccer and is a member of a women's soccer club. She has elderly parents whom she visits regularly and she is close to her sister, although they only talk on the phone as her sister lives in another state. At times Mary is bored at work but she doesn't really mind as her job helps pay her bills. She is saving up for an overseas holiday with Jack. She is also putting money aside for one of her future goals, which is to go to university. Mary is often concerned about her appearance as she is tall and appears to have “big bones.” She thinks she doesn't look very feminine but Jack has told her he likes her as she is. Let's see how Mary judges her self-worth. This will be illustrated using a pie-chart, which shows how important the various things in her life are to her.





You can see from the relative sizes of the pieces of this pie chart that the most important things in Mary's life are her family, boyfriend and friends, sport, and her future goals. Travelling, her job, and her body shape are important to her, but less so. In general, people with different interests in their lives might have pie charts similar to the example of Mary's. When judging their self-worth, they might consider their *personal qualities* such as kindness, loyalty, willingness to help people, sense of humour, *relationships* with family, friends, partner, and *skills* such as achievements, ability to play sport, cook, or play a musical instrument.

People with eating disorders tend to judge their self-worth based largely on their shape and weight and their ability to control these. They may have other interests, but over time these seem to take a lesser place in their lives. This system of self-evaluation may have developed through particular life experiences, and/or the influence of family, friends, and the media. In Westernised societies the pressure to be thin can be conveyed through television shows, films and magazines endorsing slim and attractive actors and models, as well as advertisements about diet products and articles about diets. Being slim is equated to being attractive, desirable and successful – in short, being of worth. People with eating disorders are particularly susceptible to these messages. They come to believe that they are only of worth if they can control their weight and shape and be thin – or thinner than they happen to be. Their ability to control their eating, shape and weight takes up a very large part of their pie chart, and becomes overly important in their lives. They begin to judge their self-worth largely on this ability to control their eating, shape and weight. Below is an example of what their pie chart for self-worth might look like.



This pie chart shows how people with eating disorders put most of their “eggs in one basket,” so to speak. They are banking on this ONE area of their life to work out for them so that they can be happy and believe that they are of worth. Doing this is very risky! If they judge their self-worth largely on their ability to control their eating, shape and weight and they are having problems with this, they will be likely to judge themselves negatively and think that they are of no value.

When people base much of their self-worth on only one thing in their lives, they are putting a **tremendous** amount of pressure on making sure that it works out. That's why it's not surprising that people with eating disorders tend to be very conscious about, and try so hard to control, their eating, shape and weight. It is also not surprising that they often experience mood swings, feel irritable, depressed or anxious, and think negatively about themselves. Only when they consider their body shape and weight to be acceptable can they be happy. However, even this might be temporary, because they have to make sure it stays that way and that they don't put on any weight!

We will talk more about this in the next section, but before we do that, use the worksheet on the next page and take a few minutes to work out what might be the things that are important to your self-worth, and draw your own pie chart. Then, ask yourself what you notice about how YOU judge your self-worth as you work through this exercise.



My Self-Worth

What are the things that you judge your self-worth against?

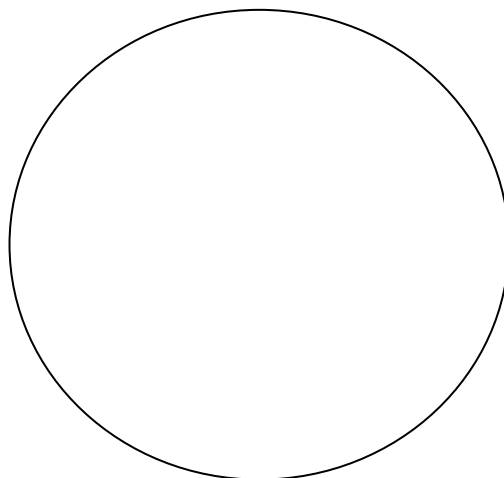
Now, rank the items for self-worth in terms of their importance. One way of finding out how important each item is, is to ask yourself, *“If something goes wrong in this area, how much does it get to me?”*

Things that are important to my Self-Worth

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Now draw your Self-Worth pie chart, making each item a ‘slice’ of the pie, with items that are more important taking up bigger slices, and so on.

My Self-Worth Pie Chart





Extending the Other Areas of Your Life

Take another look at your self-worth pie chart from the previous page. What are the things that are important to your self-worth? How many 'slices' have you got in your self-worth pie chart? Is controlling eating, shape and weight in one slice? Is it very much larger than the other slices? If this is the case, then you are banking on this ONE area of your life to work out for you so that you can believe that you are of worth. You may also have other interests and things in your life, but over time, perhaps these have taken a lesser place.

One important and effective way of reducing your over-evaluation of body shape and weight (and their control) is to begin to extend the other areas of your life – enlarging the other slices of your pie, so to speak. When you start doing this and keep at it, you will find that your life becomes more balanced and you will feel more content over time.

Use the worksheet on the following page to help you do this. Begin with identifying the other areas of your life that might be important to your self-worth but have now taken a lesser place (or become smaller slices in your pie charts). Now choose one area you would like to start with and then think of some activities you could engage in to help you do that. Here's an example.

Jessica identified that friends, hobbies, work, and family were areas that had taken a back seat to her constant concerns about her shape and weight. She realised that in the last 2 years, she had only had contact with her friends once every few months for fear that they would criticise her for putting on weight. She also admitted that she had not played her guitar, made any candles, or gone for walks on the beach, which were things that she had loved doing. She also recognised that she was not enjoying her work very much and was spending a lot of time at work thinking about food and planning her meals. She decided that she would start with getting back to her hobbies and planned that she would play her guitar twice this week and start making candles again. She also thought about asking her boss if she could change some of her work tasks so that she would have something different to do at work.

Notice in the above example that Jessica has identified 4 areas of her life that she is thinking of enlarging. However, she is beginning with the 2 that she thinks she could manage at this point in time. It is usually wise to make changes gradually, beginning with what you think you can manage or activities you will successfully complete. Also, don't be too quick to give it up if at first it doesn't feel comfortable engaging in an activity. Often, when you try it again a few times, you'll feel more comfortable and will even experience pleasure or a sense of achievement.

Sometimes before you begin an activity, you might find yourself thinking that you don't feel like doing it and want to put it off until you do. People often want to wait until they feel motivated before they act. However, another important thing to bear in mind is, motivation may not come on its own, but when you ACT first, motivation will then follow. Remember, ACTION before MOTIVATION, and you'll soon find that your life will be more balanced and you will be less preoccupied with only one area of your life.

Try and use a new "Extending Other Areas of My Life" worksheet every week and plan to repeat some activities and add new ones. After some time, you may want to extend or enlarge another area of your life and you can use the worksheet to plan your activities for this new area as well.





Extending Other Areas of My Life



Putting all your eggs in one basket and banking on one area of your life to work out for you is probably not helpful in ensuring happiness and confidence in yourself. You not only put a lot of pressure on yourself to make that area work out but you might also become extremely preoccupied with it. It is important that you try to extend the other areas of your life.

Begin first with identifying one or two areas of your life you would like to begin extending, and then plan activities in these areas of your life you can engage in. Consider activities that involve other people. Then, using the 0 – 8 scale provided below, rate how much pleasure and sense of achievement you experience BEFORE and AFTER doing these activities. This is important because you are more likely to repeat activities that can give you a sense of pleasure and achievement. These activities will not only help you extend these areas of your life but will also increase your sense of self-worth.

Areas of my life I would like to extend or enlarge:

1. _____ 2. _____

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Absolutely None	Minimal	Slight	Mild	Moderate	Much	Higher	Very High	Extreme

		Pleasure	Achievement
Date:	Activity:		
Activity:		Before: _____	_____
		After: _____	_____
Date:	Activity:		
Activity:		Before: _____	_____
		After: _____	_____
Date:	Activity:		
Activity:		Before: _____	_____
		After: _____	_____
Date:	Activity:		
Activity:		Before: _____	_____
		After: _____	_____



What to Expect From this Information Pack

This Information Pack follows on from Information Pack A, in which we introduced strategies to help you change your *behaviours*. The rest of this Information Pack covers ways of helping you change your *thoughts* related to disordered eating and weight control habits.

When you have completed this module and feel ready to move on and tackle more aspects of your disturbed thoughts, you can progress through this Information Pack. *The modules in this information pack have been designed to be completed in the order they appear.* We recommend that you work through the modules in sequence, finishing each module before moving on to the next one in the series. We believe that by doing this, you will maximise the benefits you might receive from working through this information pack.

The following are the modules that make up this Information Pack B:

- Module 2: Checking, Avoidance & “Feeling Fat”
- Module 3: What are Mindsets?
- Module 4: Changing Mindsets
- Module 5: Low Self-Esteem
- Module 6: Improving Low Self-Esteem
- Module 7: Maintaining Progress & Preventing Relapse





Module Summary

- This is the first module of Information Pack B, which follows on from Information Pack A. In the previous Information Pack we helped you change your *behaviours* associated with disordered eating and weight control measures. In this Information Pack we will be helping you change your *thoughts*, or cognitions.
- People with eating disorders place an unusually high value on controlling their eating, weight and/or shape, and they judge their self-worth accordingly.
- As a result, it is easy for them to become preoccupied with thoughts about eating, shape and weight. This serves to maintain the way they judge themselves according to how well they control eating, weight and shape.
- It is important for people with disordered eating to expand other (non-eating/weight/shape-related) areas of their life.

What I Have Learned in this Module

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

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

Coming Up...



In Module 2 (Body Checking/ Avoidance & “Feeling Fat”) we’ll explore further the effects of basing one’s self-worth on controlling eating, shape and weight.



About This Module

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We would also like to thank Karina Allen for her contributions to the presentation of these Information Packs.

BACKGROUND AND REFERENCES

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

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

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