

Expert Support Series: **Mental Health**⁺

30-60-90
**Mindset Milestones
Workbook**

Workshopping Your Way to Long-Lasting
Weight Loss: Thought Exercises Designed
to Strengthen Your Mindset

Written by Dr. Katie Rickel

Preface

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Working through these exercises – designed to help you navigate challenges that will arise in the 4 focus areas – will enable you to create a mindset and behavioral repertoire that will support your long-term weight loss success. As you navigate through your first 3 months of this journey, it will be critical to examine your source of motivation, social relationships, habits, and relationship with food. If you do not attend to these areas, chances are that you will quickly slip back into the old patterns and dynamics that caused you to gain weight in the first place...and it will only be a matter of time before the weight finds its way back to you. Certainly, your medication is a powerful tool in the change toolbox; however, losing only the pounds will only go so far in getting you closer to the life that you have always wanted. Nothing changes if nothing changes. You don't just want a smaller body in the same exact life. Give yourself the opportunity to think bigger and brighter.

This time – the last time – with the powerful tool of medication coming along for the ride, you will have the opportunity to make tweaks to your mentality and lifestyle that will facilitate long-term success. We have created a workbook to guide you toward your 30-, 60-, and 90-day milestones. At each milestone, you will be presented with a set of activities and thought exercises in 4 key areas: motivation, your relationship with food, social relationships, and habits & lifestyle. We will also be offering webinars to review the exercises for each of the milestones. We encourage you to attend these interactive events.

Everyone's journey is different, so you are certainly welcome to take what's helpful and leave what's not. However, we believe that taking your mental and emotional health seriously through this process will be the difference between this being yet another diet attempt and this being your forever solution to lasting weight loss.



30-Day Milestone:

Motivation



Writing a Letter to Your Future Self

The beginning of your weight loss journey is a critical time to establish your “why.” Chances are that you have been struggling for some time, and the negative implications of carrying excess weight are ever-present in your life. In fact, you may have gotten so used to some of these feeling states that they feel like your new normal. Given that you have made the choice to begin treatment, it is possible that you have finally realized that you are sick and tired of being sick and tired. You may even have the thought “I will do anything it takes to feel better.” It is so important to document – now – these reasons that you are so compelled to make a change because they will be good reminders down the road when the going gets tough. It is perfectly normal and natural for motivation to wax and wane over time, so you will do yourself a favor if, at this time of high motivation, you bottle all of your reasons.

One way to capitalize on this time of high motivation is to write a letter to your future self. Perhaps you might imagine you are writing to yourself one year from now. You are at a place in which you feel significantly better in your body, and some of the pain of carrying excess weight has dissipated. You are watching yourself start to slip into some old habits – habits that you know are a slippery slope. It is natural to take your foot off the gas, so to speak, when you are in a more comfortable place, so it is not unusual to let the complacency to take over.



How do you feel when you wake up in the morning?

What are the most difficult parts of your day?

What have you been putting off doing until you are more comfortable in your body, physically and emotionally?



**How has your professional life been impacted by your weight?
What opportunities have you turned down or not pursued at all
because of fears related to your weight?**

**What kinds of physical sensations (pain, aches, etc.)
bother you most on a daily basis?**

**What are ways in which your weight/health are currently
negatively impacting the way you show up for your family?**



What activities have you been avoiding because of your weight?

How have your relationships suffered because of your weight?
Your romantic relationships? Your friendships?

What will your life look like one year from now
if you do not make a change?



What experiences would you like to have in the next 10 years when you are more comfortable in your body?

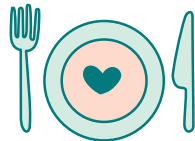
If you'd like to take this exercise a step further, there are a variety of websites that allow you to send an email to yourself at a future date. <https://www.emailyourfutureself.com/email> is one; <https://the-self.club/future-self/> is another.

You can send yourself this very letter, and you just may receive it when you need to hear (from yourself) the most!



30-Day Milestone:

Relationship with Food



Finding Alternative Ways to Self-Soothe

For many people who struggle with weight, food has become the go-to for dealing with any and all negative emotional states. This association between food and distress starts during our first few days of life and continues into adulthood. In infancy, our cries were soothed with the bottle or the breast. As young children, snacks were often given during long car rides or after we were brave during a scary doctor appointment. As we moved into adulthood, we learned to soothe the pain of heartbreak with a pint of ice cream. It's no wonder that we have learned that food is our comfort in times of distress. It's the most convenient, cheapest, fastest, most socially acceptable way to give ourselves some momentary pleasure when we are faced with the pain of life. Further, sometimes the relief even starts with the planning of and fantasizing about what we will eat. To this end, the entire process of coming up with the idea, procuring the food, planning for eating, the act of eating itself, and then the often described "food fog" that has come over us when we have eaten...it's a powerful elixir that has been effective (at least in the short term) time and time again.

Interestingly, many people find that when taking weight loss medication, food no longer gives them that reward that it always has. People are often very surprised that they are no longer thinking about food around the clock, often have trouble putting their finger on "what sounds good", and then find that they don't have much appetite when it comes time to



consume the food. Because the medication does blunt the pleasurable nature of the entire process of eating, people often find that they are grieving the “loss” of a friend who was always there for them. When we’ve not developed a wider variety of ways to cope and soothe ourselves, it can be difficult to know how to care for ourselves in other ways. Therefore, it makes good sense to come up with some alternative ways to soothe. Read through the list below and circle that appeal to you. Add some of your own!

Note that many of these things will not give the same “bang for your buck” as food once did, but over time, you will re-train your brain to be calmed by these other avenues:

- Listening to music
- Learn a TikTok dance
- Soften your hands with sweet smelling lotion
- Light a candle
- Listen to a podcast
- Read a chapter from a favorite book
- Go for a walk
- Sit outside in nature
- Rub sweet smelling lotion on your hands
- Drink a glass of very cold water
- Smell an essential oil
- Look back at pictures from childhood
- Call a friend to whom you’ve not spoken in many years
- Take a bubble bath
- Put a cool towel on your forehead
- Visualize a location in which you feel safe and calm
- Reminisce about a favorite vacation
- Plan a vacation or stay-cation
- Doodle
- Allow yourself to cry
- People watch at a park or shopping mall
- Binge a podcast
- Put fresh sheets on your bed
- Blow bubbles
- Buy a beautiful plant
- Soak your feet in warm water and Epsom salts
- Lie under a weighted blanket
- Ask a loved one for a hug
- Make a playlist of your favorite songs
- Search YouTube for a guided meditation
- Re-read old emails or cards that you have received from loved ones in the past



30-Day Milestone:

Social Relationships



Building Your Tribe of Support

As you are beginning your weight loss journey, you may wonder whether to tell your family, friends, and co-workers about what you are undergoing. People often experience some ambivalence here, since part of you may be excited and wanting to share, whereas another part of you may feel embarrassed, anxious, or even ashamed. Further, because our struggle with weight is one that may be more visible to others (compared to any other health condition that may be more invisible), we often experience a need to explain ourselves or to get ahead of questions that may come. It is important to remember, however, that you do not owe anyone any explanation about the “what”, “why”, or “how”.

If you do want to share with people in your life, however, it may be helpful to think about how these people might be able to support you. There are many different kinds of social support - 4 specifically - that have been identified, and as you read through them below, make some notes about who in your life might be best suited to provide that kind of support. Usually, there are people in our life who are particularly good at providing certain kinds of support but are not so great at providing other kinds. It is unusual, in fact, to find someone who is great at providing all kinds of support, so it can be helpful to diversify our support resources. Further, it's perfectly OK if you don't feel you need or want support in any of these categories.



Emotional Support:

This kind of support is what most people think of when considering social support – a shoulder to cry on, someone to vent to about your difficulties, someone to celebrate with when you are excited, someone to cheer you up or motivate you when you are feeling stuck. Who in your life would be best at providing emotional support as it applies to your weight loss journey:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



Tangible Support:

This type of support refers to help or assistance that you may need during your weight loss. Tangible support might include transportation to the gym, childcare for when you are preparing healthy meals, or financial support to help you pay for medication. This type of support is more material or concrete, and it is support that might take a task, responsibility, or burden off your plate. Who in your life is good at giving tangible support, and more importantly, what kinds of tangible support do you suspect you might need?

_____	for this need:	_____
_____	for this need:	_____
_____	for this need:	_____
_____	for this need:	_____



Informational Support:

Information support is just what it sounds like – people who can give you information about topics they know more about than you. Informational support can be given by family and friends who have been through similar challenges, or it can be given by health and wellness providers who might be experts in an area. Examples related to weight loss might be recipes, exercise techniques, or instructions regarding medication and side effects.

_____ for this info: _____

_____ for this info: _____

_____ for this info: _____

_____ for this info: _____



Companionship Support:

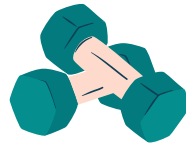
This final type of support refers to anyone whose mere presence might feel supportive to you. Interestingly, this kind of support does not require anything of the support beyond them just being “with” you — either physically or in spirit. A pet, someone deceased, or the individual whose name you don’t know (but is always pulling into the gym at the same as you) can all be sources of companionship support. Just having someone there can feel supportive, motivating, or soothing.

Who in your life (any being – dead or alive) can provide you with companionship support?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



30-Day Milestone: Habits and Lifestyle



Understanding Your Habits & Triggers

Most people are surprised by how much they eat outside of their own awareness. In fact, in most weight loss studies, the researchers will ask subjects to purely document a typical week of eating (specifically telling subjects to focus on NOT changing anything), and almost without exception, the subjects will lose weight during that initial week. This is because the act of simply bringing focus to what we are eating can decrease the amount of mindless eating in which we are engaging (and in these studies, the decrease is so significant that it does result in weight loss).

Because mindless eating happens outside of our awareness, it may be difficult for you to identify where and when some of this may be occurring. Even with the assistance of medication, you may find that you eat habitually in certain circumstances. Thus, it can be helpful to pinpoint these trigger situations so that you can create safeguards as you embark on your weight loss journey.

To that end, for the next three days, please document everything that you eat. It's best if one of these days includes a weekend day, especially if your weekend routine is different from your weekday routine. No need to worry about calories or precise quantities - simply taking inventory of the time (e.g., 9:15am), location (e.g., car), food item and approximate quantity (e.g., 1 breakfast sandwich, 3 small hash browns, medium coffee with



creamer) will be helpful for this exercise. As mentioned earlier, it is best if you try not to change anything during these first three days so that you can get a true sense of your starting point.

Once you have this documented, review your logs and highlight (with a highlighter or circle with a colored pen) any eating that you might characterize as beyond what you believe you needed for nutrition (and/or quantities to provide reasonable levels of satiety). There are no hard and fast rules here, but deep down, you likely have an awareness of which eating (either in type of food or in quantity) were moving you closer to, or further from, your health goals. Then, answer the questions below and consider the associated suggestions: consume the food. Because the medication does blunt the pleasurable nature of the entire process of eating, people often find that they are grieving the “loss” of a friend who was always there for them. When we’ve not developed a wider variety of ways to cope and soothe ourselves, it can be difficult to know how to care for ourselves in other ways. Therefore, it makes good sense to come up with some alternative ways to soothe. Read through the list below and circle that appeal to you. Add some of your own! Note that many of these things will not give the same “bang for your buck” as food once did, but over time, you will re-train your brain to be calmed by these other avenues:



Timing:

Did overeating happen more on a certain day (compared to the other days)?

If so, you might consider timing your injection right before the days that you tend to overeat. Many people find that they struggle more with temptations over the weekend, and so a Friday injection day works well. For others, the start of the work week is most stressful, and so a Sunday or Monday injection can help guard against stress eating.

Did more overeating occur in the evenings versus earlier in the day?

If so, know that you are not alone. Nighttime eating is a problem for many people, and it can happen for a variety of reasons. Oftentimes we have less going on in the evenings and so more time for mindless eating. Additionally, you may have gotten into the habit of snacking to soothe yourself after a stressful day. If nighttime meeting is a problem for you, you might consider making a proactive plan to stay busy with a hobby, a book, or spending time with loved ones. Or, you could consider getting into bed earlier, as quality sleep will be helpful, more generally, in your weight loss journey.

Location:

Are there certain locations in which overeating tends to happen (i.e., in the car, at your work desk, on your couch in front of the television, standing up in the kitchen while preparing a meal)?

If there are a few locations that are commonly associated with overeating for you, you might consider drawing some hard lines against eating in those locations - one at a time! Perhaps for a week, you can focus on not eating in the car. Once that feels comfortable, transition all "couch eating" at home to a table. Working on managing the location of your eating will not only help reduce mindless eating, but it may also reduce the number of overall triggers that you contend with on a day-to-da basis. When you always eat at the car, or at your desk, for example, that location actually becomes a trigger for eating in and of itself. It takes some time and attention to rewire these associations, but it is possible.



Food Origin:

Are you noticing that you tend to overeat more in restaurants versus when you are eating at home?

If so, as simple as it sounds, you might consider putting a distinct limit on the number of times that you eat out (or eat food prepared outside your home) each week.

If this is impossible, an alternative is to choose a “go to meal” at a couple of restaurants, and opt for one of those when you do need to eat out. Part of what drives mindless eating and overeating is having an endless variety of tempting foods. Especially if you are choosing to eat out because you are in a rush or stressed for time, you will likely not be in a position to choose an option that moves you closer to your goals. Thus, if you have a “go to” option that is more nutritious than other choices, you will reduce some of the friction that comes when it’s time to make your selection.



Other Themes:

Do some detective work as you are considering any other commonalities among your overeating episodes. Do you overeat in the company of certain people? Are you finding that you eat during times of the day or the week when you are bored? Are there certain holidays, events, gatherings, or celebrations that are particularly difficult to manage? Planning ahead for any of these triggers will set you up for success.

60-Day Milestone: Motivation



Celebrating Non-Scale Victories

At this two-month mark, it's important to take stock of improvements that you have seen so far that perhaps are not reflected by the number on the scale. Remember that there is no award for reaching a certain weight – and in fact, the “feel” of the life for which you are striving may be realized at a weight very different from that number you have in your head. Many people think back to their “high school” weight or “what I weighed when I got married” and use that as a goalpost. However, those weight goals are relatively arbitrary since your body shape, your health markers, and the way you feel are dictated by much more than a simple measure of gravity’s pull on your body.

To focus in on the improvements you may already be noticing – that are not necessarily reflected by large changes on the scale – take some time to think through each of these domains and check off which have improved since you started.



Physical Improvements:

- Wake up with more energy
- Fewer afternoon slumps
- Fewer aches and pains (joints, low back)
- Clothes are not as tight
- Sleeping more soundly
- Falling asleep easier
- Fewer symptoms of GERD, acid reflux
- Don't get as winded upon exertion
- Able to be active longer without resting
- Need fewer medications
- Feeling stronger during strength training workouts
- Improved flexibility and range of motion while moving about your day
- Less stiffness
- Improved digestion and bowel movement regularity
- Less bloating
- Improved lab markers (blood pressure, cholesterol, HbA1c, fasting glucose)

Mental Improvements:

- Better concentration
- Better memory
- More clarity at work
- Longer attention span
- Improved focus during activities
- Improved performance at work/school
- Easier to get started on projects
- Greater patience
- Increased mindfulness in routine activities
- More creativity
- Enhanced mental sharpness

Psychological/Emotional:

- More interest in activities
- Less rumination/worry
- Lower levels of sadness
- Reduced Frustration
- More hopefulness
- Improved body image
- Reduced irritability
- Heightened ability to cope with stress
- Experiencing more joy and pleasure in valued activities
- Improved motivation to start on new projects
- Enhanced ability to feel proud of yourself and your accomplishments
- Reduced interpersonal sensitivity
- Higher levels of perseverance during challenges
- More frequent bouts of laughter

Social:

- Improved ability to be present with loved ones
- Renewed interest in favorite activities
- Improved capacity to care for elderly or younger family members
- Higher libido/in improve sexual performance
- Less isolation
- More motivation to spend time with loved ones and friends
- Enhanced curiosity about the world around you
- Reduced social anxiety
- Improved confidence in social settings
- Openness to travel and new experiences
- Increased comfort eating with others or being at events with triggering foods
- Expanded range of social opportunities (that do not center around food/eating)



60-Day Milestone: Relationship with Food



Grieving Your Relationship with Food

As human beings, we learn to develop and maintain ways to cope that help us to survive. For many people, food, overeating, and excess weight have been important tools for navigating life's challenges and uncertainties. As with any important relationship, there are wonderful and positive parts of the dynamic, and there can also be unhealthy and even destructive aspects of the dynamic. Therefore, when we end these relationships, there is often a need for grieving the loss of the function that the relationship served.

For many people taking weight loss medication, food is not nearly as rewarding as it once was, and there can be a sense of loss here for you. You likely have memories around food and eating that are filled with joy and pleasure, and it is natural to undergo some mourning as your relationship with food and eating changes. Further, if your weight was serving some kind of protective function for you, losing weight can also feel like you are parting ways with a close companion. On the other hand, there are surely ways that your relationship with food led to pain and suffering, and it is normal to also have feelings about that.

As your former relationship with food is replaced by a new relationship with food, it can be helpful to make space for the grief. One of the ways to process this grief is to write a letter. You may choose to write your letter to



food itself or to your excess weight, or a combination of both. Use the prompts below to construct a letter that resonates with you. Feel free to use some, all, or different prompts suggested below.

Gratitude

I want to thank you for...

Some of my best memories with you include...

You really supported me through the difficult time when...

You helped me to feel..

Something that I will always appreciate about time with you is...

You kept me safe from...

You gave me comfort when...

I'll always remember the joy we had when...

I'm so grateful for the way you...

Anger

I resent that you...

Something that you made so much more difficult for me was...

You made me sacrifice...

You made me feel awful when...

Because of you, I lost the opportunity to...

I wasted many years when I could have...

You lied to me when you made me believe...

I hate that you...

Hopefulness for the future

In my new chapter, I will feel empowered to...

Without your burden, I can become...

I will never again take for granted...

As I begin to feel better, I will be able to...

When you are no longer holding me down, I can't wait to...

I now feel strong enough to...

I will never miss...



60-Day Milestone:

Social Relationships



Dealing with Other People's Comments

Although losing weight can feel like an intensely personal and private process, many people find that it soon becomes an extremely public conversation – especially after your body starts to change visually. While your friends and family may think that they are encouraging you by commenting on your altered appearance, these comments – whether they are positive or negative – can stir up feelings of anger, resentment, confusion, shame, and embarrassment. Listed below are some thoughts and feelings that people often experience whether other people make comments about their weight. Check off which resonate for you:

- “I hate that my body is suddenly the big topic of conversation.”
- “When I hear that I look so great/different now, what does that mean about how I looked to you before?”
- “When you ask how I lost the weight, why does that matter? If I used medication or had a surgery, does that make my success less valid?”
- “Now that I’m getting all of these compliments, I feel even more pressure to continue losing.”
- “Are people going to be disappointed or think less of me if I gain the weight back?”
- “Are these people giving me attention now because of my body (and not because of who I am as a person)?”

In dealing with these comments, a useful tool can be the “broken record approach.” In this approach, you come up with a short statement – that you keep in your mental back pocket – that you repeat over and over whenever people start engaging with you about your weight loss. These statements can be effective in either shutting down the conversation or pivoting the conversation to a dialogue that feels more comfortable for you. You may want to utilize different statements for different groups of people, but having these at your ready can allow you to quickly exit or deflect uncomfortable conversations. Here are some examples but feel free to craft a few of your own that feel authentic:

- “I am actually more excited about how much better I feel.”
- “I have a lot more energy these days.”
- “I have been prioritizing my health.”
- “I’d like to keep the focus on how I feel instead of how I look.”
- “It’s been a lifestyle change.”
- “I’m working hard, and it’s paying off in more ways than just how I look.”
- “Can we talk about something other than my body?”
- “I know you mean well, and so it would be more supportive to me to focus on things other than my appearance.”

Finally, you might give some thought to whether there **WOULD** be any comments that would be helpful or supportive to hear from your friends and family. If you have a sense of what these might be, you can give your circle some direction about how they can support you verbally. Here are some examples of comments that might feel supportive. Give your support system a “cheat sheet” if any of these resonate:

- “You are just glowing.”
- “You really look happy.”
- “I’m so glad that you are prioritizing yourself.”
- “You are an inspiration to me.”
- “I can tell that you really care about this.”
- “You are working so hard, and I am so proud of your efforts.”



Conversely, there may be topics that are always off-limits for you. Many people find that questions about specific numbers – weight, calories, clothing sizes, etc. – are especially triggering. Don't be afraid to be transparent about that. There is nothing wrong with saying, "I understand that your curiosity comes from a good place, but I'd like to keep specifics about my [weight, calories, food plan, size] private. I know you want the best for me, and I appreciate that you care."



60-Day Milestone: Habits and Lifestyle



Mindful Eating

Have you ever heard the term “mindful eating”? Mindful eating is a concept that has found its way into pop culture, but many do not fully understand what it actually entails.

It may be easiest to understand mindful eating if we contrast it with the opposite – mindless eating. If you’ve ever gotten popcorn at the movie theater, became incredibly engrossed in the movie, and then looked down at an empty box and felt surprised to see that you had finished the entire thing – you have engaged in mindless eating. If you’ve worked through lunch and then later cannot recall what you ever had for lunch – you have engaged in mindless eating. If you get in your car and see candy wrappers strewn about with no recollection of when you ate the candy – you have engaged in mindless eating.

For some people, mindless eating is so habitual that it happens regularly and below the level of conscious behavior. For others, mindless eating has served as a way to keep busy, to numb, to distract, or to blend in with others who are eating around you. Regardless, mindless eating can lead to an excess of calories consumed for reasons other than health, nutrition, or even pleasure (as we are often not paying enough attention to even get gratification from our food).



By contrast mindless eating is characterized by making conscious decisions about what we consume, savoring our food while we are eating, noticing how our bodies react during and after we have eaten, and developing a relationship with food that is marked by intentionality and awareness. Studies have shown that mindful eating is not only beneficial for weight management but also can improve digestion, reduce anxiety, increase satisfaction during and after meals, and lead to enhanced body awareness.

Below is a script for a mindful eating practice that you can read as you are eating. Or, you can record yourself speaking the script and listen back to your recording as you are eating your next meal. It is not necessary, nor realistic, to eat every bite of every meal mindfully; however, even taking the first few bites of your meal mindfully can confer some of the benefits.

For this exercise, it will be useful to make yourself a plate with several different items, and it will also be useful to choose items that you would consume with a utensil.

As you sit down with your food in front of you, take a deep breath in and a deep breathe out. Notice what is happening in your mind as you prepare for this meal. What thoughts and feelings are you experiencing? Excitement? Anxiety? Joy? Anger? Shame? Worry?

Take a moment also to notice what is going on in your body as you prepare to eat. Scan through your body, from the top of your head, down your neck, into your shoulders, down to your belly, and finally into your legs and feet. Notice any tension that may be there, and try to release that tension.

Now take a look at the food before you. Think about the reasons that you chose the particular items in this meal. Knowing yourself as you do, which one of these foods do you expect to provide you with the most pleasure? Which one will provide you with the greatest level of satiety? Which food looks most appealing to the eye? Is there a particular aroma of one of the



foods that sticks out to you? Do you have any memories associated with any of these foods? Take a moment to ponder the answers to these questions, and take stock of how that feels.

At this point, make a conscious choice about what your first bite will include. Will you put bits of more than one item on your utensil, or will you focus on one food item at a time? As you prepare your first bite on your utensil, hold the utensil close to the plate for a few moments. Really look at the food sitting on the utensil and notice its colors, shape, texture, weight. Now, every so slowly, bring the utensil closer to your mouth. As your utensil gets closer to your mouth, notice what happens in your body. Are you salivating? Is the aroma of the food getting stronger? What thoughts are you having at this point? Frustration with the pace of this exercise? Longing? Anticipation?

Now place the bite in your mouth and try to hold it on your tongue – before chewing or swallowing. As it sits there, notice again the texture, the temperature, the flavor, the weight of the bite. Roll it around in your mouth to see if it gives off different sensations depending on where it is on your tongue.

Next, move the food to the side of your mouth so that you can take a bite into it. See how the food changes with that single bite. At this point, proceed to chew the food, and try not to swallow until it is chewed up completely. When you have chewed it to a pulp, allow yourself to swallow and try to trace the food, in your mind's eye, as it goes down your throat, your esophagus, and into your belly. Once it is in your belly, check in with yourself to see how you feel. One bite more nourished, one bit more satisfied, one bite more powerful, one bite more energetic.

Challenge yourself to try this process – again, even if for only the first bite of each meal. As you do this, just take notice of how different the experience of eating can become when we do it with awareness and intention.



90-Day Milestone:

Motivation



Keeping the Motivation Going

Motivation is a feeling that naturally waxes and wanes over time. With weight loss, it is common to start the journey with very high motivation. At that time, the effects of carrying excess weight were likely negatively impacting you in countless ways, each and every day. However, once you have had some weight loss success and feel better – physically and emotionally – it is easy for that motivation to subside and for sneaky behaviors to creep back in. Thus, especially at this 90 day mark, it is crucial to give some thought to how you will stay motivated for the long-term.

One way to build in these “motivation insurance policies” is to cultivate a life that requires you to continue paying attention to your health, weight, and well-being. This can be done in a variety of ways. Read below for some ideas:

- 1 Take up a volunteer position that requires you to be physically healthy and agile. If you are a dog lover, you might consider walking four-legged friends who are living at a shelter. If you love children, you might reach out to surrounding elementary schools to see if they need sports coaches or adults to sit on the floor with children to read. If you have an interest in construction and community service, you might look into Habitat for Humanity and sign up to build homes for the homeless. As this volunteering becomes a regular presence in your life, you will have an additional “why” to maintain your weight loss.



- 2 Serve as a mentor (or facilitate a peer-led support group) for those who are in the beginning stages of their weight loss journey. This concept of serving as a “sponsor” (common in 12-step programs) helps both parties – the mentor and the mentee –with their healthy behaviors. Many people take pride in being a role model to others, and there can be a special kind of accountability that comes with “walking the walk” when you are leading other people with similar struggles.
- 3 Join a hobby group that requires a certain level of physical fitness. For many people who have struggled with their weight, taking part in group fitness activities has been daunting. However, becoming part of a community with a shared fitness interest is a very effective way to keep yourself moving, even when you don’t feel like it. Pickle ball, Zumba, racquetball, spin classes, a walking or hiking club, aqua fitness, adult kickball, or ultimate frisbee are just a few of the types of activities that tend to foster encouragement, fun, and togetherness. You might even think back to earlier times in your life to jog your memory about the kinds of activities that you enjoyed before your weight held you back.
- 4 Become a caregiver for family and/or friends. Being able to chase after toddlers or having the physical ability to assist a frail elderly person from their bed to the dinner table are tasks that require a good deal of strength, stamina, and agility. Although caregiving can be demanding (for anyone), it can also be rewarding to have someone depend on you for their most basic needs. The old adage of “put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others” applies here, as your health and well-being may be an asset that you can bring to your family and friends who need assistance.

Using the above as starting-off points, brainstorm below some new activities and pastimes that would not only fill your cup, but also give you additional reasons to continue to keep the promises you made to yourself at the start of this journey.

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90-Day Milestone:

Relationship with Food



Getting More Support

For some people, issues with food and weight are purely the consequences of misinformation around nutrition and/or poor habits that have slowly resulted in weight gain over time. For the vast majority, though, food and excess weight have played an important, albeit often subconscious function, of numbing psychological and emotional issues. We know that food and eating are quick, cheap, and convenient ways to spike the “feel good” chemicals in our brain – namely dopamine and serotonin – and therefore it can easily become the cure-all panacea for distressing feeling states such as depression, worry, trauma, social anxiety, or sadness. When food and eating no longer pack the same “relief” punch as they once did (as is typical with GLP-1s), it is not uncommon for people to notice that these less pleasant emotions rise to the surface.

While it may feel uncomfortable to suddenly be experiencing these strong emotions, it is important to remember that emotions are our mind and body’s way to communicate that there is an underlying issue that needs attention. When you are numbing those emotions with food, you may have less awareness of them; over time, however, they can still have deleterious effects on your well-being. Thus, it is critical that you pay attention to these emotions as an invitation to process your past and to develop strategies for future coping. Further, it is sometimes helpful to do this work with the support of a mental health professional who are specially trained to help you manage distressing feeling that arise.



There are a number of ways to access support. Read through the list below and consider which may be the best fit for you:

- 1 988: If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, you may call or text “988” to speak to a counselor (in English or in Spanish) at no cost. 988 is a government-sponsored crisis hotline designed for individuals who are facing mental health challenges, emotional distress, drug or alcohol concerns, or just need someone to talk to. You will be connected with a counselor for a confidential and supportive conversation, and they can help you develop a game plan to cope with your crisis.
- 2 12-steps: Twelve-step programs are no cost, mutual aid programs – hosting both in-person and virtual meetings around the clock in many locations around the world – that promote supporting recovery from substance and behavioral addictions. Although there is a misconception that most 12-step programs are strictly faith-based, there is wide variation across specific groups, and individuals without a religious- or faith-based association are welcome to attend. The 12 steps started as a way to support those battling alcohol addiction (Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA) but the organization expanded to support those struggling with a vast array of issues, including Clutterers Anonymous, Co-Dependents Anonymous, Love Addicts Anonymous, Debtors Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Neurotics Anonymous, and even Workaholics Anonymous.
- 3 If you are looking to find an individual therapist, there are a number of websites through which you can search for a provider who may be a good match. Open Path Collective (<https://openpathcollective.org/>) is a site that is committed to providing affordable therapy with a licensed provider that offers sliding scale fees (based on your income). If you wish to use your health insurance or are willing to pay out of pocket, sites like Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>), Headway (<https://headway.co/>), or Therapy Den (<https://www.therapy-den.com/>) are options. Further, if you are employed, your Human Resource department may be able to guide you to EAP (Employee Assistance Program) benefits to receive confidential mental health counseling with a third party provider who is contracted with your employer/company.



60-Day Milestone:

Social Relationships



Evaluating Your Relationships

It is not uncommon, during a weight loss journey, for your relationships to change – in small ways and sometimes in significant ways. Long-standing relationships may have been based in activities and behaviors that are no longer interesting to you or that are counterproductive to your new health and wellness goals.

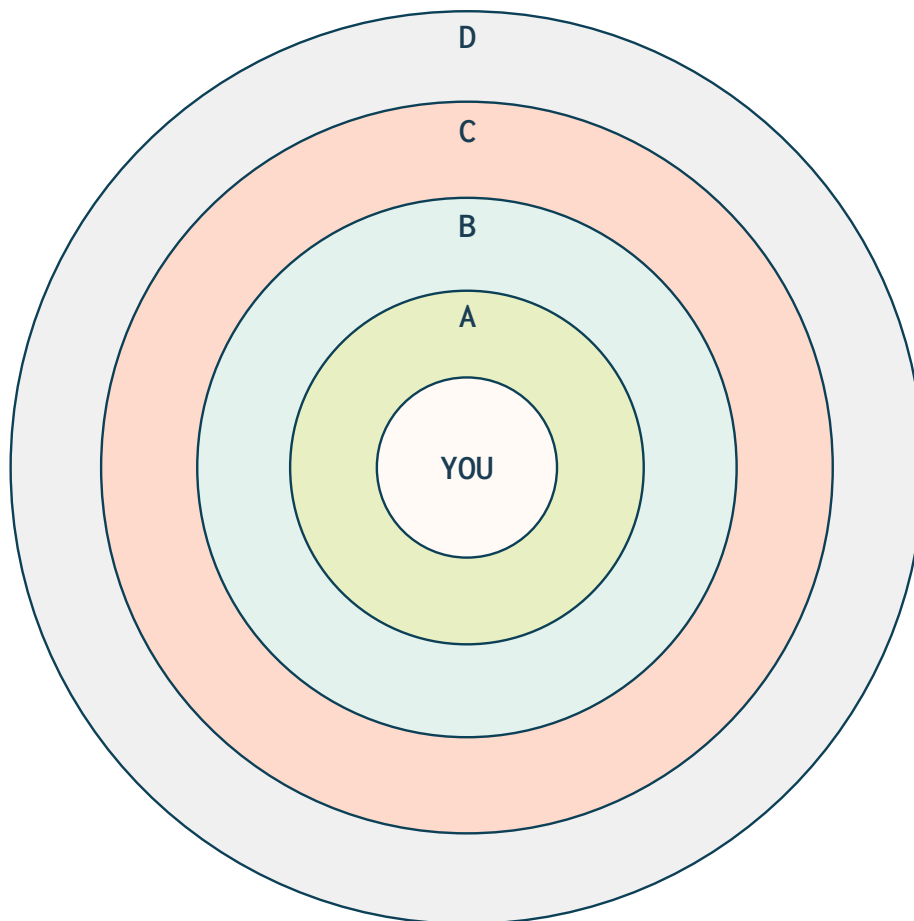
Further, you may find that you have family members and friends who also struggle with their weight; sadly, they may feel threatened by your success if they perceive that it shines a spotlight on their own difficulties. Additionally, they may believe (correctly or incorrectly) that your expanded life and increased confidence will make you question whether the relationship can and should continue in the ways it always has.

There is a saying by motivational speaker Jim Rohn that we are the average of the five people that we spend the most time with. While the truth of this statement is debated, certainly your social environment has the ability to impact your feelings, thoughts, choices, actions, and values. It is critical, as you solidify your new lifestyle, that you take a careful inventory of that environment to see if there are individuals whose impact leads you further, rather than closer to your goals.



There is a well-known concept of concentric circle friendships, an idea popularized by psychologist and anthropologist Robin Dunbar. He theorized that people have concentric circles of friendships, starting with their most intimate relationships and increasing in distance as the circles move outward. These circles include 5 most intimate relationships, 15 close friends, 50 good friends, 150 general friends, 500 acquaintances, 1500 known names, and 5000 known faces. Each of the outer circles includes those people in the circles interior to that circle, and the social ties weaken as you move outward along the circles.

For the purpose of this exercise, please use this adaption of the theory (simplified for our purposes):



A . Individuals in Group A are the people that you call first when something significant happens in your life – good or bad. These relationships have shown consistency over time, and you trust them with your innermost thoughts, feelings, and desires.

B . Those in Group B are those who are confidants and those whom you would invite to a small dinner party or gathering. They may not be the first ones you call about important events, but you would be sure to fill them in the next time that you see them.

C . Those in Group C are acquaintances, coworkers, and neighbors. You might have mutual interests and common ground, but you would not think to reach out to them if you were in a time of need. You might share about the more surface level happenings in your life, but you have no expectations that they would show up for you in a time of need. Likewise, you would feel uncomfortable if they shared with you about something highly personal going on in their lives.

D . Those in Group D are people that have proven to you that they are not trustworthy and do not have your best interest at heart. You notice that, when you are with them, you are the worst version of yourself. You cannot and do not confide in them, and it would feel highly uncomfortable to share personal details about yourself or your situation.

Now, make a list of up to 10 people that you interact with most on a daily basis and place them in one of these 4 categories. (Don't get stuck if they seem to straddle more than one category; place them where they show up most of the time.)



Person

Category

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Looking over your list, consider the following questions as you take inventory of the people most frequently in your social world:

Do you feel as though you have enough people in Group A? If not, are there people in Group B or C that might earn a spot in Group A over time if you worked to deepen the relationship?



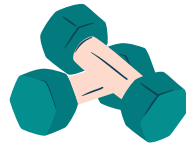
Are there any individuals who were once in Groups A, B, or C but have moved closer to D as you have gotten more serious about your health and weight loss journey? How has that distance been helpful and how has it hurt?

Thinking about the people in Group A, how have you cultivated and deepened those relationships to the point that they are in your closest circle? Do you have the time/energy/desire to go through a similar process with others (others on the list or future people whom you may not have met yet)?

This exercise is simply one to increase your awareness about your social influences and the ways in which you are spending your (inherently limited) social time and energy. Relationships can and should evolve over time, so it's important to check in with yourself about whether those closest to you are (or are not) making a positive impact in your life.



90-Day Milestone: Habits and Lifestyle



Dealing with Slips, Lapses, and Relapses

Believe it or not, there has never been anyone – in the entire history of weight management – who has completely avoided some regression into old behaviors at some point in their weight loss journey. In fact, having episodes of overeating or veering off your plan are inevitable. One too-large portion size or even a full-out binge will not destroy your progress; however, when these overeating episodes become habitual, you can find yourself gradually moving further from your goal.

When thinking about this topic, there is often reference to different stages of returning to old behaviors – specifically, a slip, a lapse, and a relapse.

- * A slip is characterized as a single and isolated behavior that is out of line with your plan. This might be a meal that was too large, a single afternoon of mindless snacking, or missing a planned exercise session because you chose to sleep in.
- * A lapse usually entails more than one behavior and refers to behaviors that are repeated over time. However, in a lapse, there are still many behaviors/routines intact that are moving you closer to your goal. For example, a lapse might look like going out to dinner and overeating every night for a week straight, while you are still eating your planned meals for breakfast and lunch and while you are remaining diligent with your exercise program.



- * A relapse (also called a collapse), refers to a scenario in which you have totally abandoned all efforts toward your goal. In a collapse, you would no longer be attending to anything nutrition-, fitness-, wellness-, or health-related.

Obviously, the earlier you identify a slip and return to your healthy behaviors, the less likely that slip is to turn into a lapse. And then, the quicker that you are able to catch yourself in a lapse and reinstate the behaviors that have fallen by the wayside, the less likely you are to fall into total collapse.

To help yourself in this process, it can be helpful to identify “red flag behaviors.” These are behaviors that are your personal beginnings to a slippery slope into a slip or lapse. Everyone’s red flag behaviors are different. To understand your own red flag behaviors, imagine that you are watching yourself on a television show and you are just about to slip into old habits. Think about what you might be able to SEE yourself doing (think about visible behaviors/actions, as they are easier to identify than feeling states). Some examples might be:

- Skipping breakfast
- Eating in restaurants more than once a week
- Snacking between meals
- Eating in the car
- Skipping planned exercise sessions
- Mindless snacking while watching television
- Going to the grocery store without a list
- Have an unplanned dessert after dinner
- Eating treats at the office



Once you have identified your own “red flag behaviors”, it can be helpful to write them down and keep them somewhere you reference often. That way, if you find that you have returned to the behavior, you can use that as a signal that you may need to make some shifts or adjustments to your routine or environment. List out some of your personal “red flag behaviors” below:

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