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Overcoming Disordered Eating

Information Pack B

In Charge ... Mindsets Matter

Module 9

Maintaining Change & Relapse Prevention

Introduction	2
Maintenance Plan	2
Worksheet: Progress Checklist	3
Creating a Maintenance Plan	4
Worksheet: My Maintenance Plan	5
Relapse Prevention in the Long Term	6
Worksheet: My Relapse Prevention Plan	8
Putting it all together	9
Module Summary	10
About This Module	11

This is the final 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*. We also recommend 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

Congratulations on making it to the end of this Information Package! In this Information Pack B we have described unhelpful thoughts and thinking styles, and offered you strategies to change the *thoughts* that maintain disturbed eating and weight control methods.

If you haven't read all the modules of Information Packs A and B, it might be good to go back to the ones you missed. If you have worked your way through the modules, you will have learnt the facts about your disordered eating and the skills you need to overcome it. It is unlikely that you will have overcome all your disturbed eating and weight control behaviours, and that's OK - you can continue to work on changing. If you have just read through the modules without engaging in change, that is fine. When you are ready to commit to changing your disturbed eating and weight control behaviours, you can go back to the beginning and work through the modules, or you might choose to seek professional help.

In this final module of Information Pack B we will devise a plan for maintaining the positive behavioural and cognitive changes that you have already achieved. We will also examine relapse prevention in the long term. You will find a summary of all the concepts and strategies that were introduced in the previous modules.

Maintenance Plan

To maintain the changes that you have already achieved, you will need to devise a personal maintenance plan. Making changes is not enough – you need to continue your progress and maintain those gains. A plan is useful to help you stay on track. To make your plan, you will need to review your progress to date and identify what problems you still have. You will then need to identify what has been particularly useful to you in helping you overcome your disturbed eating habits and weight control behaviours. Finally, it will be beneficial to identify positive habits that will help you to maintain the changes you have made.

Reviewing Progress

Now is the time to review the progress that you have achieved. You will need to conduct a thorough review, as you did at the end of Information Pack A. Remember, to make changes you need to be aware of what is going on, so it is important to be clear about what is going well and what is still a challenge.

Initially, you implemented behavioural change through self-monitoring and regular eating. As you progressed through the two Information Packs, you addressed binge eating; compensatory behaviour such as purging (vomiting and/or laxative, diuretic misuse) and driven exercise; strict dietary rules (about when, what and how much to eat); preoccupation with food, eating, weight, shape and control; feeling fat; fear of weight gain; weight and shape checking (and avoidance); low self-esteem; and the eating disorder mindset.

You may now find it helpful to identify the areas in which you have made positive changes. Changes you have achieved may include removing dietary rules, learning to eat regularly, ceasing driven exercise, limiting body checking, or bringing an end to binge eating. When you identify your progress, congratulate yourself! You should feel proud of the changes you have made so far.



Inevitably there will be areas in which your progress is limited. Remember that changing long-established habits is a difficult task, so don't beat yourself up for not being completely over your disordered eating. Just because you have almost reached the end of this Information Pack, it doesn't mean that this is as far as you will go with overcoming your disturbed eating habits and weight control behaviours. There is every chance that, if you apply yourself and use the techniques and worksheets introduced in the earlier modules, you will be able to continue your progress. To gain more information about your progress in overcoming your disordered eating, complete the Progress Checklist overleaf.



Progress Checklist

Please rate yourself on how much these issues are present for you (over the past week):

	No problem	A little	Moderate	A lot	Extreme
Physical health					
Being underweight (BMI under 19)					
Menstruation (irregular/absent)					
Other physical complications					
Disturbed eating habits and weight control behaviours					
Binge eating					
Vomiting					
Misuse of laxatives/diuretics					
Over-exercising					
Irregular eating ("when")					
Low variety of foods ("what")					
Undereating ("how much")					
Preoccupation with food/eating					
Preoccupation with shape/ weight & its control					
Feeling fat					
Fear of gaining weight or getting fat					
Frequent weighing or avoidance					
Body shape checking or avoidance					

Positive Change

Look over the Progress Checklist and consider your progress. What changes have you already made? Do you eat regularly? Have you changed your eating habits? Have you stopped binge eating or purging? Are you following guidelines instead of strict dietary rules? What are the behaviours or thoughts that cause you little or no problem? Take some time to identify the positive changes that you have made, and list them.



Remaining Challenges

Now it is time to identify remaining problem behaviours. This does not mean that you have failed. Changing ingrained habits is a difficult process and takes time. Identifying your problem behaviours will help you direct attention to areas that need more work. What behaviours are still challenging? What areas did you identify as “a lot” or “extreme” problems and need more work? Identify your problem areas and list them.

Creating a Maintenance Plan

Overleaf is a worksheet to help you create a plan for maintaining your progress. Before completing it, take a minute to consider the following:

Useful Techniques/ Strategies

Looking back over the modules, what strikes you as particularly useful? Was it a tool such as the **Thought Diary** from Module 2, or a strategy, such as **conducting a Behavioural Experiment**, or **Problem Solving** (Module 3)? Or was it the importance of taking a step back from yourself in order to analyse what was going on? You may want to use your favourite techniques and tools over and over.



Good Habits

Another useful way to help maintain change is to identify your good habits. These are behaviours that have helped you to make changes. Identifying your good habits will remind you what behaviours to keep up after completing this Information Package, and help you to maintain your changes.

Good habits can be thoughts or behaviours. One of your good habits might be to examine unhelpful thoughts critically. Another good habit might be to avoid talking about diets with friends or family. Alternatively, if you are in a mood that encourages old habits, your good habit might be to take a quiet moment to breathe and dispel the mood. What good habits do you use to maintain changes? What things have you learnt and used that have been the most helpful to your treatment? What helps you stay on track?

Healthy Eating Habits



In what ways are you now eating that minimise the chance of your engaging in disturbed eating habits and weight control behaviours? What healthy habits have you adopted and want to keep up? This might include eating regularly, or eating with your family again.



My Maintenance Plan

Healthy weight

My healthy weight range is between _____ and _____ kg.

I need to work hard to accept this weight range as a healthy, realistic weight range for me. I need to continue to work towards attaining and sustaining a weight within this range.

Techniques and strategies that I've found useful and that I would like to keep using:

Useful techniques/strategies	Which Information Pack & module was it in?	What page?

Good habits – the thoughts and behaviours I've found helpful and want to maintain:

Healthy eating habits – the healthy eating patterns I've adopted and want to keep up:



Relapse Prevention in the Long Term

It is important that you have realistic expectations about your eating and weight control behaviours after you have completed these modules. Having worked through this Information Pack, it is likely that you wish to be completely free all your disturbed habits. Unfortunately, your vulnerability to disturbed eating and weight control behaviours will probably be an Achilles heel forever. It's as if the eating disorder DVD still exists, even if it's lower in the stack. Whilst you may have stopped engaging in these behaviours, you will have to be constantly on the watch for warning signs that these behaviours are creeping back. That is why it is so important to keep a relapse prevention plan ready for action. When these behaviours do start to re-emerge, you will be ready to face them.

On Page 8 there is a worksheet to help you put together a plan for preventing relapse and dealing with setbacks. Before you jump in, consider the issues below so that you can create a strong relapse prevention plan:

Times of High Risk

As you progressed through this Information Pack, you will probably have found that it was harder at certain times to stick with your attempts at overcoming your disordered eating. These situations are known as “at risk” times and it is likely that you will experience these. Times of high risk can involve situations such as weight gain, stress, periods of dieting, holidays, or exams. These situations make it harder to perform tasks that keep you well. For example, you might find it harder to take a step back and critically examine unhelpful thoughts, or harder to follow your maintenance plan when you are stressed. It is important to identify your times of risk so that you are prepared to prevent setbacks when they occur.

What are your “at risk” times? What situations make it hard to maintain changes? Identify your times of risk and write them down on Page 8.



Early Warning Signs that the Mindset/DVD has ‘Clicked’ in

Once you have reviewed your progress, it is important to identify the early signs that warn you of possible setbacks. These signs warn you that old disordered eating habits are creeping back into your thoughts or behaviours. In other words, the eating disorder mindset, or DVD, is operating. Early detection of these problems is crucial to staying on track. The better you become at detecting these early warning signs, the more chance you will have of maintaining your positive changes. You may recall the task of identifying what triggered the eating disorder DVD that we introduced in Modules 7 and 8.

An early warning sign may be a particular thought pattern. For example, on a bad day you may have low self-esteem and think of yourself as “fat”. You may also know that thinking in this way encourages you to purge. If this is the case, then this thought is an early warning sign of an old habit. Alternatively, an early warning sign may also be a behaviour. For example, you may start checking your weight more. If this encourages you to restrict your food intake, then it is helpful to recognise this as an early warning sign of a possible setback.

To identify your own early warning signs, think about your past experiences. You may find it useful to consult the records in your food logs. What situations or thoughts preceded an unwanted behaviour? Could these be your early warning signs? What thoughts and behaviours signal or trigger your problems? When are these warning signs most likely to occur?



Combating Warning Signs

Now that you have thought about your early warning signs, you can devise a plan for dealing with them. Firstly, you need to identify the points at which you will need to act. Have a clear understanding of your early warning signs. When you have it clear in your mind that you will need to act if a certain thought or behaviour appears, you will not let your early warning signs go unheeded. Secondly, once you identify the need to act, do it immediately. Do not wait for your warning sign to develop into problem behaviour. It is easier to combat a warning sign early than to deal with a return to disordered eating habits. Thirdly, have a plan to combat your early warning signs that is specific to your needs.

Developing a plan to combat your warning signs is a personal task. Use the skills you have developed throughout these modules to combat your early warning signs. Is your warning sign a thought? If it is, critically examine your thought. Where is it coming from? Is it reasonable? Logical? Alternatively, is your warning sign a behaviour? If so, critically examine this behaviour. Why are you doing it? Do you need to do it? Does it make you feel better or worse? What are the consequences? Use the answers to these questions to combat the thought or behaviour. As you develop plans to combat your warning signs, use the problem solving strategy we examined in Module 9 of Information Pack A. Finally, you may find it useful to re-examine any relative modules to find a strategy that works for you.

What will you do to combat your early warning signs? Develop your plan for dealing with these thoughts and behaviours.



Dealing with Setbacks

It is likely that you will experience occasional setbacks after finishing these modules. However, it is important to view a setback as a *lapse*, not a *relapse*. Just because you make one mistake doesn't mean you have relapsed to your old pattern of disturbed eating or weight control behaviours. Instead, view a lapse as an interesting phenomenon to be understood. Take a "helicopter view" – take a step back from your behaviour, and examine it critically. Examine your lapse as if you were watching someone else. What led to the lapse? How might you deal with it better in the future? What steps do you need to take to get back on track? In this way, you are using a lapse as an opportunity to learn from your mistakes.

Take some time to consider how you would deal with a setback. What would you do? How would you handle the situation?



My Relapse Prevention Plan

Times of high risk:

<i>e.g. Christmas</i>	

Warning signs & combating them:

Early warning sign	Thought? Behaviour?	Challenge it!	Develop a plan
<i>e.g. skipping meals</i>	<i>behaviour</i>	<i>I know that skipping meals makes me more likely to binge</i>	<i>Keep to regular eating, even though I'll be eating more at Xmas</i>

Dealing with setbacks:

Lapse behaviour	What lead to the lapse?	What could I do differently in the future?	What do I need to do to get back on track?
<i>e.g. Binged and purged</i>	<i>Not sure - restricting? Skipped a meal?</i>	<i>Regular eating. Remember, both 'everyday' foods & 'occasional' foods are OK</i>	<i>Eat regularly, eat mindfully, eat slowly. Put food on plate first</i>



Putting it all Together



In Information Pack A we offered you strategies to help you change your disordered eating and weight control *behaviours*. In this Information Pack we have suggested ways in which you can change the *thoughts* associated with your disordered eating and weight control methods. We would like to summarise all the important concepts and strategies introduced to you in the previous modules of this Information Pack, to help you put together everything we have presented you.

In Module 1 we addressed the over-evaluation of weight and shape. We looked at how people with eating disorders judge their self-worth according to how well they control their eating, shape and weight. We suggested expanding your areas of interest in order to find new ways of evaluating your self-worth.

In Module 2 we looked at the Thought-Feeling connection and learned how using Thought Diaries can help you challenge your thinking.

In Module 3 we revisited dietary rules and learned how to conduct Behavioural Experiments to test out predictions and beliefs. We looked at possible reasons for any residual binge eating, and introduced Problem Solving as a useful strategy.

In Module 4 we examined how this over-evaluation of weight and shape often leads to both preoccupation with shape and weight and additional efforts to control these by various forms of body checking (or avoidance). Both of these and the mislabelling of negative emotional states as “feeling fat” contribute to maintaining the vicious cycle of disordered eating. We encouraged you to reduce your body checking behaviours and learn to label your feelings more appropriately.

In Modules 5 and 6 we discussed how low self-esteem often involves negative core beliefs about oneself, combined with unhelpful rules and assumptions about living. We showed how you could work on changing old negative patterns of thinking and develop more balanced views about yourself.

In Modules 7 and 8 we described the concept of the eating disorder mindset and likened it to a DVD, showing how this keeps the eating disorder going. We explained how important it is to challenge this belief system, and we offered tips on how to challenge or “eject” the eating disorder mindset/DVD.

In this module, Module 9, we have encouraged you to take stock of your progress in overcoming your disordered eating. We have suggested that you review what has been helpful in both this Information Pack and in Information Pack A, especially what strategies have been useful, as part of a maintenance plan. We then asked you to develop a relapse prevention plan, to help you manage your eating-related behaviours and thoughts in the future.

We hope that the information and strategies have been helpful in facilitating change and will of use to you in the future. We wish you well in continuing with healthier behaviours and thought processes related to your eating, shape and weight, and your ability to control these.

Remember, you may always be vulnerable to disordered eating and weight control behaviours. However, using your maintenance plan and your relapse prevention plan will help you continue engaging in healthier eating and weight control measures. We encourage you to keep up the work you have already done and even to go back and read over the earlier modules. This is for two reasons: to consolidate the gains you have made, and to change or challenge any unhelpful behaviours or thoughts that still affect you. People don't get over eating disorders overnight! You have to keep working at your unhelpful thoughts and harmful behaviours – until your new habits become just that: habits that require less conscious thought as they become more automatic and part of your normal routine. IT'S WORTH IT!



Module Summary

- This is the last module in Information Pack B, which has provided strategies to change the *thoughts* associated with disturbed eating and weight control measures.
- Your progress review should help you identify positive changes and remaining problem behaviours that require more attention.
- To help you maintain your changes after completing this Information Package, you will need to review your progress and develop both a maintenance plan and a relapse prevention plan.
- Your maintenance plan should include a list of useful techniques you have learned from working through the modules; a list of good habits that have helped you achieve progress and that you would like to continue in the future; and a list of healthy eating habits you have developed and want to keep up.
- Your relapse prevention plan should include: times of high risk, early warning signs; combating warning signs; and dealing with setbacks.
- Don't view a lapse as relapse. Use setbacks as an opportunity to learn from your mistakes.
- You need to have realistic expectations about life after completing the modules. You will always need to be watchful for signs of old habits creeping back.
- A summary of each module in this Information Pack is provided to give an overview.

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.



About This Module

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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
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