

## Break Free from ED

*An Active Guide to Recovering from Your Eating Disorder*

### Module 7

## **Eating For Recovery: Part 2**


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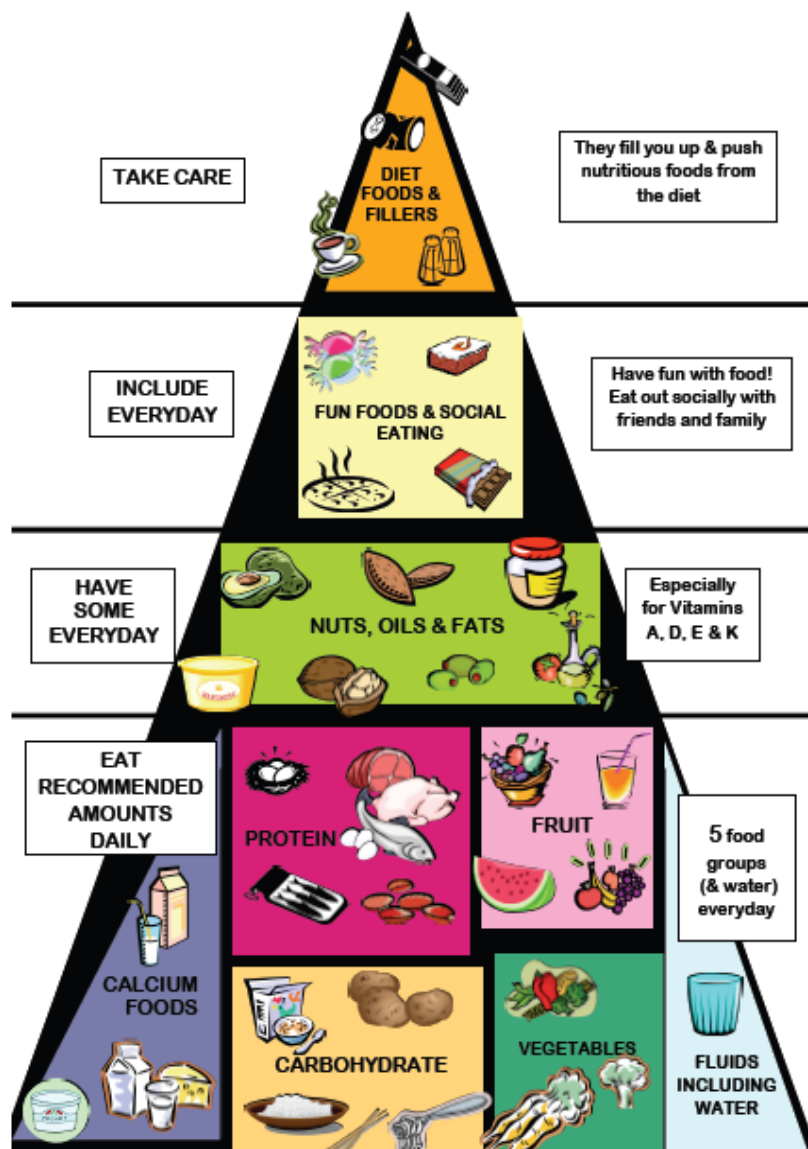
*If you are restricting your food intake, using self-induced vomiting, over-exercising, laxatives or diuretics for weight-control, or have lost weight recently, it is important that you talk to your medical practitioner and get a full medical check-up, as there are many physical complications that can arise as a result.*

## Introduction

In Module 6 you established a pattern of structured, regular eating, and started working towards eating enough to reduce symptoms of starvation and renourish your body back to its healthy set point. We will now turn our attention to the types of foods that you are eating. We will introduce the R.E.A.L. Food Pyramid to learn what a healthy variety of food looks like. We will also identify the rigid and inflexible food rules that keep your eating disorder going and start to experiment with including feared foods as part of recovery.

## What is R.E.A.L Healthy Eating?

The Recovery from Eating Disorders for Life Food Pyramid (R.E.A.L. Food Pyramid) is a meal planning guide for individuals with eating disorders. It provides helpful general guidelines for healthy, flexible, and enjoyable eating of a variety of foods. 



It can be helpful to look at local resources that provide information on recommended nutritional intake within each food group – for example, the REAL Food guide:

<http://cbt-t.group.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/REAL-Food-Guide-Appendix-5.pdf>

Remember that general guides do not consider your individual nutritional needs. During recovery from an eating disorder, you may need to consume more than recommended while you are renourishing your body and testing out your fears about particular foods. You may find it helpful to consult with a dietitian.

## My Food Variety

If your nutritional intake is varied and flexible, you will be including many different foods within each of the food groups. Let's look at your food variety using the table below. Take a look at your last week's self-monitoring and write down the food that you have eaten in each food group over the past 7 days. If you are unsure which group the food belongs to, you can check the R.E.A.L. Food Pyramid.

Food Group	Examples	R.E.A.L. Food Pyramid: Why eat this?	Food I ate in this group over the past week
Carbohydrates	cereals, rice, oats, bread, noodles, potato, quinoa, pasta, tortillas	Eating regularly throughout the day stabilises blood sugar and provides fuel for muscles and brain	
Protein	meat, chicken, fish, eggs, cheese, tofu, chickpeas, lentils, baked beans, ham, kidney beans, nuts.	Growth and repair of body tissue, all body functions	
Vegetables	salad, pumpkin, cabbage, leafy greens, broccoli, mushrooms, peas, capsicum	Vitamin C, folate, potassium, beta-carotene, dietary fibre	
Fruit	fresh fruit (apples, orange, banana, grapes), dried fruit (sultana, dried apricots), fruit juice	Vitamin C, potassium, dietary fibre	
Calcium	milk, yoghurt, custard, cheese, Up & Go	Bone health, vitamins D & E	
Fun food	chocolate, cake, lollies, cookies, potato chips	Flexible and social eating, enjoyment, less rigidity, less risk of binge eating	
Fluids	water, juice, tea	Hydration. Have about one glass for each meal and snack, more on hot days or when exercising	
Nuts, Oils and Fats	butter, olive oil, avocado, margarine, nuts, mayonnaise, peanut butter, olives, hummus	Vitamins A, D, E, & K	
Diet Foods and Fillers	diet soft drink, artificial sweeteners, sugar free sweets, excessive sauces, condiments, chewing gum	Nothing really wrong with them but may push out more nutritious foods	

You have already read about carbohydrates. Now let's find out The Facts on Fat. 


## Limited Variety and Rigid Dietary Rules

What did you notice about the variety of food you are eating? You may have some food groups that you are doing pretty well with and others that you are pretty low in terms of variety or perhaps you are attempting to exclude some food groups altogether. It is common for people with eating disorders to consume a limited variety of food and to rigidly stick to eating foods they think are 'safer'. Let's think about why you might have started limiting your food variety.

### Dieting messages

Over your lifetime, you have probably been exposed to many diets and messages advising cutting out or limiting particular food groups. Dieting messages tell people to: avoid fats, avoid carbohydrates, avoid added-sugar, cut back on red meat, avoid dairy; the list goes on. These messages tell you that there are 'good' foods and 'bad' foods and even that some foods are 'cleaner' than others. But if we added all these rules together, we might find that there is nothing left to eat!



In reality, diets have an extremely low success rate and persistent dieting behaviour can actually contribute to significant weight gain in the long-term. Diets just don't work! 

### Rigid and inflexible dietary rules

Not only are diets ineffective as a method for long-term weight control but they contain food rules that are inflexible and rigid, involving words such as *must*, *never*, and *always*. Rigid rules don't take into account that all foods have some nutritional benefit and leave no room for the changing circumstances of life such as unplanned events, celebrations, day to day food-preferences or nutritional needs. People with eating disorders tend to hold very rigid, dietary rules that contribute to limited nutritional variety ('I must not eat carbohydrates', 'it is never okay for me to eat cake', 'I must avoid fats').

Limited variety and rigid dietary rules can lead to a range of problems including:

- Stress and anxiety about having to follow strict food rules
- Thinking excessively about the food you are trying to avoid, which may also affect concentration
- Difficulty eating out or sharing meals with family or friends
- Arguments or tension in your relationships
- Increased risk of binge eating, or feeling guilty or disappointed when a rigid rule is broken
- Nutritional deficiencies

### Feared food predictions

Over time, people with eating disorders tend to collect more and more rules, leading to fewer foods that are viewed as 'safe' to eat. The list of feared foods grows, and they will tend to develop negative, or even catastrophic, predictions about what would happen if they started including feared foods regularly.

Common predictions about including feared foods include:

- I will gain weight uncontrollably and it won't ever stop
- Weight gain will creep up on me over time
- If I have one bite, I won't be able to stop eating and will binge
- I will lose control of my eating
- It will make me fat, bloated and heavy

## Feared Foods

You have already identified food groups where you are including a lot of variety as well as those where variety is very limited, or you may be attempting to avoid that food group altogether. The next step is to write down a list of foods that you have been avoiding so we can start to identify the beliefs you have about these foods and then test out the accuracy of these beliefs.

- **Write down the food you are avoiding:** You can identify avoided foods by comparing your food variety with the R.E.A.L. Food Pyramid, by looking at your self-monitoring for hints, or by visiting a supermarket (online or in person) and recording food that you avoid buying.
- **Rate the strength of your anxiety:** How anxious are you about including this food regularly on a scale from 0 (“not at all anxious”) to 10 (“extremely anxious”)?
- **Prediction:** What do you think would happen if you included this feared food regularly?

### My Feared Foods

Food I avoid	Rate anxiety (1-10)	My prediction: What do I think will happen if I include this regularly?
e.g. hot chips	9	If I eat a small serve of hot chips 3 times this week, I will gain 2 kilograms

## Experimenting with Feared Foods

It makes sense that you feel worried about including foods that you have been limiting or avoiding when the predicted outcome seems so scary. As mentioned, you might be predicting uncontrollable weight gain, sudden changes in your weight or shape, increased binge eating, or worsening of mood. But what if your predictions are not accurate?

The best way to find out whether or not your predictions are accurate is to test them out using a **behavioural experiment**. Like a scientist doing an experiment, behavioural experiments involve testing out what really happens when you start to include feared foods. Behavioural experiments provide a structured way of systematically and directly testing our fears. This will take some courage. Let's take a look at the following example of setting up a behavioural experiment to address feared foods.



## Setting up a Feared Food Experiment - Example

**Step 1: Pick a feared food from your feared foods list to experiment with:** Hot chips

**Step 2: Prediction.** Make sure your prediction is very specific so you can test it out. What are you afraid will happen if you include this food?

**My prediction:** If I eat hot chips 3 times this week, I will gain 2 kilograms

How much do I believe this (0-100%): 90%

**Step 3: Behavioural experiment.** What will I do to test out my prediction?

*I will eat a medium-sized hot chips from my local shop on Saturday, Tuesday, and Thursday this week to have with my evening meal. I will continue to eat regularly and not restrict my eating while doing the experiment.*

*Time frame: 1 week*

**Step 4: Evaluate the results.** What actually happened?

*My weekly weighing showed that my weight did not go up after 1 week. In fact, it was slightly lower than last week*

**Step 5: Reflect on the experiment.** What did I learn about my original prediction?

*I am quite shocked about this as I haven't eaten hot chips for such a long time. I still feel scared that if I continue to eat hot chips my weight will go up, so I need to continue the experiment for a few more weeks to test this out.*

**Step 6: Re-rate the strength of your original prediction (0-100%):** 55%

**Step 7: Double-down for improved learning.** If you still believe the prediction to some degree, then you can double-down on your feared food experiment. What experiment could you conduct to 'prove' that your feared prediction is true? You may need to include the food more often or try a larger portion!

*Maybe the problem is that I only had chips THREE times this week. If I include chips FIVE times this week, then I would definitely gain two kilograms!*

**Step 8: Repeat.** Experiments need to be repeated until you are confident that you have really tested out your prediction. Your feared food needs to be included at least **3-4 times each week** to benefit from the experiment. Be brave and keep experimenting until you are no longer afraid of that food. Then move on to the next feared food.

## Conducting Experiments

Now it is time to put things into action by conducting your own behavioural experiments. Choose a feared food that you are willing to start including, even though you feel anxious about it. Use the blank behavioural experiment record on the next page to plan an experiment to test your fears.

Research shows that regularly conducting behavioural experiments is more effective than doing them 'now and then'. We suggest you **aim to complete an experiment each week**. Once you have chosen a feared food to experiment with, you will need to include it at least 3-4 times in the week. Use the Feared Food Experiment record, like the one on page 9 to plan experiments and record what you learn.

Remember, you will feel anxious when you begin to make changes. That's normal and perfectly okay – anxiety is safe and it's unrealistic to expect it to just 'go away'. We encourage you to be curious about what you learn as a result of making these changes, rather than just focussing on your anxiety. Reminding yourself of your learnings from each experiment will help to reduce your anxiety over time.

## Benefits of Making Big Changes

You might be tempted to try a small change rather than a big change when experimenting with feared foods, because it seems less overwhelming. However, we know that the more challenging we make behavioural experiments, the more we learn from them.

Let's take a fear of dogs. If you predict that 'dogs will always attack me', you might choose to start by approaching a puppy to test this out. You might feel anxious at first when near a puppy, but the anxiety subsides. You might learn that 'puppies don't always attack people; in fact, they are kind of cute'. But when faced with a large dog you are probably still going to experience the same high level of anxiety as you haven't learnt anything about what happens when you approach large dogs.

On the other hand, if you are extremely brave and start by approaching a large dog, you might also notice an initial peak in anxiety that subsides over time. You might learn that 'large dogs don't always attack people; in fact, the large dog just licked my hand'. Learning that 'large dogs don't always attack people' will also help you with a fear of medium sized dogs or puppies. Testing out 'big' fears means that your learning is much faster and more impactful – and you'll probably be less afraid of smaller fears as a result!

What is scary for one person is not necessarily scary for another person. So, you will need to work out the best way of testing out feared foods for you. Try to be as brave as you can. The most important thing is to regularly start including the foods that you have been avoiding because of your weight and shape concerns until you are no longer scared of them.





## My Feared Food Experiment

**Step 1: Pick a feared food from your feared foods list to experiment with:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 2: Prediction.** Make sure your prediction is very specific so you can test it out. What are you afraid will happen if you include this food?

**My prediction:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How much do I believe this (0-100%): \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 3: Behavioural experiment.** What will I do to test out my prediction?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Time frame:* \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 4: Evaluate the results.** What actually happened?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Step 5: Reflect on the experiment.** What did I learn about my original prediction?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Step 6:** Re-rate the strength of your original prediction (0-100%): \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 7: Double-down for improved learning.** If you still believe the prediction to some degree, then you can double-down on your feared food experiment. What experiment could you conduct to 'prove' that your feared prediction is true? You may need to include the food more often or try a larger portion.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Step 8: Repeat.** Be brave and keep experimenting until you are no longer afraid of that food. Remember, your feared food needs to be included at least **3-4 times each week** to benefit from the experiment.

## Rules about Approaching Food and Eating

As well as rules about types of foods, you may have more subtle food rules that relate to how you approach food, the way that you eat, or how eating relates to other eating disorder behaviours. These rules also keep eating disorders going and cause distress and discomfort. Below we have listed some of the many rigid rules people hold about how they approach eating and food. We have also listed examples of behavioural experiments that could be used to test out these rules:

### Other food rules

My rule	An experiment that could test out this rule
I can't eat before I exercise	I will eat breakfast every day before I go to the gym this week
I can only eat food I have prepared myself	I will eat a meal prepared by someone else 3 x this week (e.g. my partner, a restaurant)
I must know how much energy is in the food I am eating	Stop reading food labels and weighing/measuring food for 1 week
I can't eat more than others are eating	I will deliberately eat more than other people at dinner time 3 x this week
I must not eat anything unplanned	For 2 weeks I will say yes when someone offers me food outside of my plan (e.g., when there is morning tea at the office or on my Mum's birthday)
I must eat very slowly	I will eat all my meals this week within 20 minutes and snacks within 10 minutes by setting a timer
I can't eat in front of others	I will eat my lunch in the communal lunch room this week with my colleagues

Have you noticed any rules directing how you approach food that cause you distress or keep your eating disorder going? If you have, then you can use the behavioural experiment worksheet to test out what happens when you don't follow them. You need to keep experimenting and testing out your feared predictions each time you notice another rule is popping up as you work on your recovery.

Let's develop a plan for addressing the other food rules you have. Select ideas from the table above or write down your own ideas. Remember, it's important to be specific about what you predict will happen and note down whether your prediction was true on your behavioural experiment worksheet!

### My other food rules:

My rule	An experiment that could test out this rule

## My Weekly Progress Tracker

First, complete your symptom tracker:

Eating Disorder Behaviour	Frequency (# days per week)	
Restrict or dieting		
Exercise (including time spent)		
Binge eating	# days	# episodes
Vomiting to control my weight/shape		
Laxative misuse		

Second, reflect on your self-monitoring:

What did I learn from my self-monitoring this week? e.g., “when I eat regularly it is easier to concentrate”, “I have been able to cope with weight changes”, “when I eat more during the day I don’t feel strong urges to binge in the evenings”, “I’m still fearful of carbohydrates and need to make an effort to include them every day”

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Third, review your homework from last week:

Task	Completed? Y/N
Weekly weighing	
Self-monitoring daily and in real-time	
Eating regularly (i.e., 3 meals and 2-3 snacks daily)	
Eating adequate quantities of food	

Finally, set some goals! What do you want to work on this week?

(e.g., continue self-monitoring every day, eat 3 meals and 2-3 snacks daily, experiment with feared foods and tick them off my feared foods list, experiment with other rules I have related to my approach to eating)

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## Module Summary

- In this module, we explored how rigid and inflexible rules about food can lead to only eating a very limited variety of foods that you think are 'safer'.
- We introduced the R.E.A.L. Food Pyramid, which provides guidance on varied eating during recovery from an eating disorder.
- We asked you to develop a list of feared foods and to identify the specific fears you hold that lead to your own limited variety.
- Then we asked you to experiment with including feared foods by setting up an experiment to test out whether your fears were accurate.
- We discussed the importance of testing out feared foods over and over until your fears about that particular food have been thoroughly tested and you have learnt what happens when you include the feared food regularly.
- You can also use experiments to test out fears related to the way you approach food.

**Coming up...**Binge Eating

## About the Modules

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### REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package.

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