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Mindful Eating & Stress Management Educational Program

Homework Suggestions: Session 2

Lesson Material

We want to come back to the present moment because it is only in the present that we:

1. learn
2. love
3. understand
4. change
5. find joy and happiness
6. heal
7. can disengage from the thoughts/feelings and actions which drive our problematic eating behaviors
8. compassion
9. peace

What is stress? (Wear and tear on the body and mind)

Having health problems, losing a job, relationship problems, traffic, being overweight etc.

Fight or flight response.

We inappropriately react to threats as if we were being attacked by a lion.

The body reacts as if there was a lion attacking.

Also we fight or flee in response to our emotions and thoughts!

All stressors have one thinking in common: a perceived sense of threat in some way.
A threat to our sense of self, physical being, sense of control, status, security, well-being etc.

80-85% of doctor visits are necessitated by stress!

The degree of one's stress is due to your perception of the situation NOT the situation itself.

Misperception of a situation causes chronic and unnecessary stress.

“I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.” Mark Twain

Another type of stress:

Stress is, in part, our inability to accept and come to terms with the present moment.

- We want things to be different most of the time which causes a stress reaction.
- We are not in harmony with the present moment.

Stress causes one of two types of reaction: React vs Response Mode

React Mode:

To **react** is to act quickly, mindlessly and without making a conscious choice (response) to a stressor.

- By distorting, exaggerating and getting carried away by our thoughts and feelings
- Automatic and habitual
- Deprives us of gaining understanding, acceptance, learn and insight into our thoughts/feelings and perceptions

Response Mode:

To **respond** is to bring awareness, stillness, balanced thinking and choice to a stressful moment.

Offers us:

- understanding, acceptance and insight into our thoughts/feelings and perceptions

Not:

- distort, exaggerated or carried away by our thoughts and feelings
- Automatic and habitual

Start to notice if you react to your thoughts or situations.

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

-Unknown

How does stress affect our relationship to food?

- We exercise less self-control.
- Our attitude toward food changes - we care less about what is healthy or unhealthy to eat.
- We perceive less options and choice. Our thinking narrows - Tunnel Vision
- Cortisol levels (a steroid hormone) increase when in a stressed state. It helps the body use sugar (glucose) and fat for energy. It increases the perception of hunger.
- When overly stressed: people tend to eat foods with more calories, more fat, more sugar etc.

We want to keep our stress level down in order to heal the body and improve our relationship to food.

1. **Want to keep our stress level down in order to be less vulnerable to reactive eating.**
2. **Keep the stress level down so the body experiences less damage.**

Ways to lower our stress level.

- Exercise
- Getting enough sleep
- Practice daily formal meditation
 - Helps to decrease reactivity and increase responsiveness
 - Increases awareness which increases options
 - Allows us to develop a state of stillness
- Eat healthy foods
- Connect with others
- Stay with awareness during a stressful moment if you have no answer, stay with the uncertainty. Expand the time between a stimulus (stressor) and your response.
Breathe through the moment!

Healing:

“Our ability to come to terms with things as they are.” - Jon Kabat-Zinn

We care what we eat! We are what we pay attention to!

8 Types of Hunger*

False hunger cues

1. Eye hunger: What you see influences your desire to eat.
2. Nose hunger: The smell of food can tempt you to eat more than you are hungry for.
3. Mouth hunger: The mouth's desire for pleasant sensations is insatiable.
4. Mind Hunger: The mind saying it wants to eat or not. Thoughts are NOT facts and do not reflect genuine hunger.

5. Heart hunger: This food will comfort and satisfy me, or it will make me anxious, feel guilty etc. Emotional hunger can never be satisfied with food. The heart wants attention not food.
6. Ear hunger: The sound of food cooking or talking and describing the taste of food creates a false hunger cue.

Genuine Hunger Cues:

7. Stomach hunger: The body's way of saying you are hungry.
8. Cellular Hunger: The body (the cells) saying it is hungry.

*Chazen Bays, J. 2009 *Mindful Eating: A guide to rediscovering a healthy and joyful relationship with food*. Shambala Publications: Massachusetts

Thoughts:

- 35-48 thoughts per minute, 50,000 - 70,000 thoughts per day
- 2% of thoughts are Facts; 98% are beliefs, ideas, opinions, perceptions, & prejudices
- 70% - 80% are negative

Given the negative and exaggerated nature of most thoughts creates a good reason to be in the body and grounded in the senses/present.

The more you indulge in judging, labeling and criticizing; the more you are reinforcing (wiring the brain) to process future experiences in this way. In this way you create unnecessary stress.

Solutions:

- Bring awareness, kindness, and non-judgment to your thoughts.
- Remember: **Thoughts are not facts! 98% of the time**
- Be in a state of observation of your thoughts, a scientist learning through observation (just watch them like a stream going by). Most thoughts are part of our reactive tendencies.
- Take note of how many times your thoughts turn out to be false.
- Quiz yourself:

1. Is it true? 2. Is it 100% true? 3. Is there another way to look at this or understand it?

“If you don't take your thoughts so seriously, they won't take you so seriously.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

Homework Suggestions:

1. Continue meditating 5-10 minutes per day
2. Continue to be more aware as you eat and drink.
Start with a deep breathe before eating or drinking.

It could be a cup of tea or coffee, bowl of soup, a piece of fruit, a cookie or an entire meal.

Use all of your senses: smell, sight, touch, taste, sound, movement, thoughts, feelings, etc. to experience eating.

Notice:

- How fast do you eat?
- How much food do you put in your mouth at a time?
- Which side of your mouth do you tend to place the food?
- Is the food chewy, soft, hot, cold, dense, etc.
- Do you get distracted by thoughts, worry, feelings, time pressures, etc.

There is nothing to do, other than to be aware; pay attention.

Notice if your hunger is false or genuine. What type of hunger is it: heart, mouth, eye etc.?

This week's quotes:

Stress

So it can be particularly helpful to keep in mind from moment to moment that it is not so much the stressors in our lives but how we see them and what we do with them, how we are *in relationship* to them, that determines how much we are at their mercy. If we can change the way we see, we can change the way we respond and thereby dramatically lower stress and it's short- and long-term consequences for our health and well-being.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Meditation is much less likely to be healing if we are using it as a way of getting somewhere, even to wholeness. From this perspective, you already are whole, so what is the point of trying to become what you already are? What is required above all is that we *let go into* the domain of being and reside in that wholeness with awareness, outside time. This is what is fundamentally healing.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Concentration

Suppose you are offered a cup of tea, very fragrant, very good tea. If your mind is distracted, you cannot really enjoy the tea. You have to be mindful of the tea, you have to be concentrated on it, so the tea can reveal its fragrance and wonder to you. That is why mindfulness and concentration are such sources of happiness. That's why a good practitioner knows how to create a moment of joy, a feeling of happiness, at any time of the day.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

When you eat a peach, do you truly taste it? Or do you bite into it, chew it a little, and then swallow it without really tasting it – perhaps while thinking about something else? In meditation, we completely taste, smell, and feel the peach when eating a peach. We totally experience whenever we encounter in *this* moment.

~Steve Hagen “Meditation Now or Never”