Week 3
Food Plan

Continue with the food diary and keep logging your emotions as they come up at each eating episode.

PROBLEMATIC EATING IS a journey, and at times it may take incredible patience and perseverance to stay the course and not give up.

The last two weeks may have felt quite difficult for you—*this is normal*. As you are working with the food diary and looking closely at your triggers and emotions, the process can bring up underlying feelings that may in turn trigger old eating behaviors. Be gentle with yourself during this time. This week we will move into more action around creating a regular eating program that works for you.

Before you go any further with week three, be sure to look closely at your food diary from the past two weeks and review your summary notes for what patterns you've identified. Be clear about how you can create some alternatives over the next week and decide how you will put self-care in place.

To obtain absolute freedom from this prisoner lifestyle, we must continually adjust our thinking to stay conscious with food and move forward. There are three ingredients you must cultivate to master this aspect. In order, they are the following:

HOW

1. *Honesty:* Objectively look at your problematic eating and acknowledge that you have a problem you cannot solve on your own.

2. *Openness:* Be open to doing whatever it takes to heal.

3. *Willingness*: This is the attitude that says, "I will do whatever it takes to have long-term recovery from problematic eating."[2]

Journal about these three qualities. Do you have enough of each to commit to your own recovery? Explain in detail.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

As Yaro explains in his description of awareness, "When the situation that led to our loss of awareness has been clarified, the next step is to decide if it is worthwhile being aware, and how worthwhile our avoidance is . . . The important thing is knowing you have the choice to be in awareness or not."[3]

BIO-INDIVIDUALITY AND FOOD

"Bio-individuality," a term coined by nutritionist and founder of the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, Joshua Rosenthal, refers to the belief that each person has different needs when it comes to diet and nutrition.

---

2 Alcoholic Anonymous World Service, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, 1939), 26.

3 Key, Tony, James Oldham, and Yaro Starak, *Risking Being Alive: The Wisdom of Now* (Queensland, Australia: Joshua Books, 2003), 17.

It makes little sense to compare yourself to anyone else as you work with a food plan. Rosenthal explains that your place in your journey is unique to you and that your body has different needs and is working with a history different from that of anyone else. This is one of the reasons standard diets fail. They don't take cultural background, personal sensitivities, lifestyle, living environments, and so forth into account.[4]

Also, people have different issues regarding food, depending on their specific thinking. For example, while you may be OK with a small amount of sugar in your diet at this point, someone else may not. You may have food allergies or sensitivities that others aren't dealing with. For these reasons, it is always important to check in with your deepest self and notice how different foods make you feel.

Which foods feel good and nourishing in your body? Which foods give you anxiety at this time or have you feeling stress?

While we know the issue isn't about the foods themselves, it is important to honor where you are and for now create a plan that feels right for you.

FOOD PLAN VERSUS DIET

A food plan isn't a diet. It isn't about restricting one's food intake or about getting off any "danger" foods. It isn't about trying to resist trigger foods or "being good" and eating only healthy food. It isn't a quick fix, and it isn't a calorie-counting mechanism. It's a tool that is changeable, adaptable, and fluid. It will be used to help identify what is working for your body and what isn't at this time.

When we create a food plan, we let go of the food that doesn't serve our bodies and minds and replace it with food we know will give us the nourishment we need and provide us with the freedom from obsession. In this way there are certain foods you will want to avoid in the beginning. You are not "restricting" these foods for fear of gaining weight or eating excess calories, but instead you are making a conscious decision at this point and time as to what foods will cause you too much stress, and you are mindfully choosing to avoid them for a limited time. However, if this process becomes a "diet" at any time, you must be very honest with yourself and constantly reevaluate your reasons for avoiding certain foods.

As you work with a food plan, you will continue to grow and change—and therefore your food plan will change with time. The idea of planning what to eat can bring up many

---

4 Joshua Rosenthal, *Integrative Nutrition: Feed Your Hunger for Health and Happiness* (New York: Integrative Nutrition, 2014), 38.

challenging thoughts and emotions. You might feel as though you don't like to plan and that planning brings up feelings of being controlled or takes away a sense of freedom. I invite you to let go of any objections you may have about food planning for the next twelve weeks and be open to this process unfolding in a way that works for you.

MEAL PLANNING

Meal planning can take some time, but it is a crucial part of resolving overeating. It is about acquiring the ability to eat without obsession and compulsion. By planning, you don't allow the mind to go into an anxious state or an uncomfortable place of uncertainty. This is about freedom.

An important point to remember here is that meal planning isn't *an end in itself*. Nobody can plan exactly what he or she will eat and when he or she will eat it forever. Planning is an important tool in developing a regular pattern of eating and letting go of destructive and obsessive thinking about food. Also, it will help you begin to listen to your body and understand when you are truly hungry, thirsty, lonely, tired, and so forth. A plan will help you to really feel what foods are good for you right now and what foods aren't serving your body and mind.

Remember that although you may have recorded your food use in the past, this is not to be used as a tool for calorie counting or dieting.

I suggest continuing to plan your eating for *at least the next three to six months*. Over time you will develop a menu of foods you can eat regularly, and you will become more comfortable with eating in response to your body's signals rather than according to your plan.

What you eat at this point in your meals and snacks isn't that important, as long you can eat it without bingeing or any other self-destructive behaviors, such as purging, taking laxatives, exercising too much, and so forth.

In other words, you want to get enough food. This area may be difficult to figure out at first, but there are four ways to deal with this difficulty:

1. If you're eating three meals and three snacks but an hour after eating a meal you feel like bingeing, you likely didn't get enough food at that meal. If you eat enough at your mealtime, you will be more satiated, and waiting for the next scheduled snack time will be easier.

2. Observe healthy restaurant meal portions from places you know are great examples of moderate portion sizes. Get examples here on how much to include in your meals.

3. Use the same plate or bowl at mealtimes so you feel consistent about the portion size.

4. Use the *food guide documented in your country a*s a guideline for appropriate portion sizes. The Canada Food Guide, for example, has appropriate references for portion sizes and macronutrient information.

DANGER FOODS

Danger foods refer to foods you may feel or have experienced as leading to a binge or restricting period—or they may simply be causing too much anxiety to eat at this time. You may have referred to them as trigger foods in the past. In this program we ask you to look at your relationship to these foods so you are aware of your thinking toward, and associations with, them. In time there will be no food item that is "dangerous" for you, because your ability to choose rather than fear any food item will be in place. For now, being honest about the foods you have difficulty with is important.

What foods do you feel are "danger foods" for you at this time? List them here.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

In the long term, you will not need to avoid or fear any foods. When you change your thinking about the foods that are triggers, you will be able to consciously make a choice about whether you want them from one minute to the next. At this early stage, however, it is best to avoid the foods that cause you problems; therefore, they most likely will not be a part of your food plan at this time.

Now, organize your list in terms of what foods seem to be the "most dangerous" (list the most dangerous first) to the "least dangerous."

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

5. _____

In the spaces below, list any problems you think you may face while setting up a plan. If you have already set up a plan, list any issues you are facing.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

5. _____

_____

Here are five guidelines to make meal planning easier:

1. Plan when you will eat.
2. Avoid "danger foods" for now as much as possible.
3. Eat every three to four hours.
4. Don't skip an eating period.
5. Don't add an eating period.
6. Don't rush around, if possible. Take the day moment by moment.

Use your eating diary from week one to establish your eating plan and record how you will implement it. What's important to remember is that the diary shouldn't be mistaken for a self-critical analysis or dieting tool. To keep this from happening, compassion is a necessary element when planning meals.

Meal Plan Example

Comments:

(Problems, Solutions, Changes Next Time)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Breakfast: _____

Snack: _____

Lunch: _____

Snack: _____

Dinner: _____

Snack: _____

Your Thoughts about Food Planning

How are you feeling about writing a food plan? Do you have any fear about this next step?

In the space below, write down any fears or apprehension you might have. Are you afraid of looking this closely at your food? Are you afraid of what others might think? Are you nervous about social situations and travel? Are you worried that you might be very hard on yourself? Anything else?

Now, write down the concrete thoughts from your writing above, and under each thought write an affirmation you believe for each thought.

For example, if your thought is

"I will not be able to stick to eating mindfully in the long term,"

a possible affirmation might be:

"I am learning how to change my thinking to stay present, and if I continue with this process, it is possible I will be able to learn how to stay present from one moment to the next."

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

5. _____

_____

6. _____

_____

7. _____

_____

8. _____

_____

9. _____

_____

10. _____

_____

Now begin to write your plan. Keep it simple and be sure to eat three meals a day and three snacks between meals. This way, you are eating every three to four hours, which will help the body find a rhythm, and your blood sugar and nervous system will find an anchor.

Don't worry about the "quality" of the meals so much at this time, but instead focus on eating at these regular times and not eating outside those times. If you do run into a problem, just get right back to your plan as soon as possible without beating yourself up or judging yourself. Be gentle and trust that you are in the process.

WHAT IS SUCCESS

Success in the past may have been restricting all day or avoiding a binge at all costs. When implementing a meal plan, success is simply following your plan throughout the day. If you have a slipup, does this mean you've failed? Of course not! Your intention is to follow your plan as closely as you can each day, and consistency here will ensure that bingeing and purging will subside. When you have followed the food plan for a day, that is a big success. If you do happen to binge or get off track in any way, simply go back to the next planned meal or snack. Remember, this is a process, and success will come in small doses that will grow over time, depending on your commitment to the plan and your ability to be gentle with yourself.

It is also important to remember that all-or-nothing thinking isn't a helpful part of this process. As stated earlier, if you happen to slip up on your plan during the day, the day isn't ruined. In fact, getting back to your plan after a slipup, finishing the day, and feeling proud of yourself for getting back on track will help you to continue with the plan and will inevitably transform that black-and-white thinking into an understanding that perfection isn't what we're after here.

So to repeat: when you have a slipup, get back on track as soon as possible.

Although going back to your regular eating pattern after overeating may feel difficult, doing so is essential to keep the meal plan consistent. Positive self-talk at this stage is imperative to remind you that the aim is progress, not perfection. Coming back to the meal plan at all costs is absolutely progress. Slips during the course of recovery are inevitable, so the key here is to be consistent and to understand and accept that this is a process. Continue to share your progress and process with the group; you aren't alone.

Marianne Williamson shares, "The difference between those people 'living their potential' and those who don't isn't the amount of potential itself but the amount of permission they give themselves to live in the present."[5]

UNEXPECTED CHANGE

Inevitably, unexpected events and situations may arise throughout your day, making it difficult to stick to your plan. This is normal, and being well prepared ahead of time will ensure less anxiety and more adaptability. Remember to ground yourself and be conscious. Stop,

---

5 Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 277.

breathe, and trust that there is a solution that may not look perfect but will be safe and supportive for you. We cannot plan everything all the time, and understanding that you may have to adapt in some situations will make the situation easier to accept so that you can be calm daily. Use your support network as you need to, and trust that you have the ability to make choices that support your recovery at all times. If you are unsure about what to do with an unexpected change to your plan, do the following:

Stop, breathe, and get into your body. To do so, begin by taking five deep belly breaths and become aware of your thoughts and body sensations. Take as much time as you need (at least five minutes).

Call a food buddy or friend to share thoughts and feelings.

Write a list of five possibilities for your situation.

PLANNING WHAT TO EAT

Planning what you're going to eat on a given day is always helpful. Some people plan the night before for the following day, and others plan on the morning of the day itself. Figure out what system works best for you and then be consistent. Make sure you include appropriate amounts in your plan to the best of your ability and have a closure to each meal if overeating is a problem. In other words, plan a cup of warm water or tea to "finish off the meal" or something else that feels appropriate to you.

If you find that the plan you created isn't working for you, you can, of course, adjust it, but it's best to stick to it as closely as possible that day and make any necessary changes at the end of the day. It's helpful to make as few changes to your plan throughout the day as possible and trust that you are learning and will find a plan that will absolutely work for you.

By being consistent with the plan, you will begin to see how your thinking affects your life and your relationship with food. Each day is a new day and a growing part of the journey. Trust that you are on the right track, even if it feels like a struggle—which, of course, is normal at times as well.

LOVE LETTER TO YOURSELF

Write a letter to yourself from a place of kindness and unconditional love. As you write, imagine yourself surrounded by light and being open to receiving the abundant love of the

universe. Think about how much you have gone through, and in a compassionate way, provide empathy, validation, and understanding in your writing. Imagine the greatest kind of love you could receive, and write about how deserving you are of this love.

Even if you don't believe this yet, write from the perspective that you are willing to believe it. Continue to remind yourself that you are as deserving as every human being on this planet and that struggles are normal and something every human deals with. Acknowledge that in the past you did the best you could with where you were to deal with your problematic eating, and today you are moving forward. Tell yourself how you will nurture and take care of the emotions that will surface. What are two thoughts you want to change? What are two actions you will do to show yourself deep love this week?

Marianne Williamson writes, "You have the unlimited power of the universe within you, and so does everyone else."[6]

How was your week, being conscious?

What can you do differently this week?

Are there any places you want to avoid?

Are there specific places and times that make you want to eat even though you aren't hungry?

6 Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 182.