

Welcome to the psychology of weight control presentation. The purpose of this presentation is to provide health and fitness professionals with a basic understanding of some of the psychological considerations that may be present with a weight loss client. The presentation will also provide techniques on how to help weight loss clients overcome psychological obstacles that can impede their weight loss goals.

After completing this section, the health and fitness professional will be able to understand different psychological obstacles facing an overweight or obese individual, understand strategies to help these psychological obstacles, and implement basic motivational and goal-setting techniques for the weight loss client.

It is important to understand that helping an individual with weight loss may not be as simple as recommending a program that will increase energy expenditure and decrease energy intake. Often, people who are struggling to lose weight have accompanying psychological issues to resolve that reach far outside the scope of the health and fitness professional.

This section is not meant to help the health and fitness professional become proficient with psychological issues, but to help the health and fitness professional gain a deeper understanding of some common psychological stresses that may be experienced by the overweight or obese population and provide some additional tools to use when working with this population. Some of these common stresses include unfavorable body image, low self-esteem, and low self-confidence. We'll begin by reviewing body image.

Body image is a dynamic variable, meaning it can change, and it can be influenced by a number of factors, including sensations we feel, perceptions of social norms, the image a person has of his or her body, and emotions. Having an unfavorable view of one's body can often be a significant factor for whether a person is willing to exercise in public.

Behaviors associated with a poor body image are avoiding mirrors, avoiding physical activity because it is uncomfortable to move, avoiding social situations, and placing blame on others. Negative body image issues can even manifest into a more serious condition called body dysmorphic disorder, which is a condition that a medical professional should treat.

A broad definition of self-esteem found in the literature describes it as encompassing the favorable views one holds regarding one's self and is generally a stable variable. Self-esteem can refer to a

general feeling, or it can refer to specific aspects of a person, such as physical self-esteem.

Exercise behavior has been associated with self-esteem through perceptions of self-efficacy, physical competence, and physical acceptance. It is physical acceptance along with physical competence perceptions that then influence self-esteem. The influence of physical acceptance on both exercise and self-esteem may be particularly important for women, since women tend to have lower levels of physical acceptance compared to men.

Self-confidence is the belief that you can successfully perform a desired behavior or achieve a certain level of performance. It is usually characterized by the expectation of success. There are several known benefits of having high levels of confidence, including positive emotions, better concentration, setting more challenging goals and pushing to reach them, and increases in effort to reach the goal.

Now we will look at self-efficacy. Self-confidence and self-efficacy are often used interchangeably. While similar, self-efficacy refers to the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce a certain outcome. Self-efficacy can be acquired, enhanced, or even reduced by mastery experiences, social modeling, social persuasion, or physical and emotional states. This means that as people get better at a skill, such as exercise, they will be more likely to continue with it.

Stressful situations can cause a person to seek food as a comfort, or in other words, they can be triggers to eat. Eating out of stress can come from a hormonal response in the form of a cortisol release, which may prompt food cravings for things that are salty and sweet. Some people associate food with feeling good in the past, and that can prompt a need for certain foods.

Stress can also cause someone to solicit friends and family to help them cope, and a social gathering will often include food and drink. Some people have an oral fixation when they are nervous, while some people simply use food to fill an emptiness they may be feeling.

The health and fitness professional may also have clients who possess eating disorders. The spectrum of disordered eating behavior ranges from moderate restriction of food intake or occasional bingeing and purging to severe food restriction as in anorexia nervosa, and regular bingeing and purging, as in bulimia nervosa. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are disorders that can only be diagnosed by a qualified medical professional.

One of the biggest challenges in the area of weight control is initiation and adherence to a new lifestyle. A variety of strategies can be implemented to accomplish this, but the health and fitness

professional needs to be cognizant of a client's reaction to these strategies. It is important to use good communication skills, which include good listening skills.

There are a number of psychological benefits of physical activity and strategies that may help people achieve their goals. Some of these benefits include improved self-confidence and body image, decreased daily and chronic stress, enhanced moods, and alleviation of depression.

Communication is an important aspect of being an effective exercise leader. Effective communication is often the difference between success and failure for exercise leaders. Therefore, it is important to send effective verbal and nonverbal messages while training clients. The following are a few guidelines for sending effective verbal and nonverbal messages.

Physical appearance-- dress appropriately for the setting in which you are interacting with a client.

Posture-- how you carry yourself will also send a message. A slumped over posture conveys low self-image or depression, whereas an erect posture conveys control and energy.

Be clear and consistent. Be careful not to mumble your words, and do not change the description of a certain exercise or drill. And be supportive. Don't be sarcastic or use negative comparisons or judgments.

This may be hard to believe, but not everyone loves to exercise. In fact, many clients are barely showing up, and they rely heavily on you to provide the motivation necessary to get them through the next hour of exercise. Be prepared to motivate your client when they arrive for a session, as they may not always be self-motivated.

To enhance motivation, one must respond not only to a person's personality, but also to the interaction of the personal and situational characteristics. Because people's motivations may change over time, the health and fitness professional should continue to monitor people's motives for exercise participation even months after they begin.

There are four basic guidelines health and fitness professionals can follow to build motivation.

Number one, people are motivated by situations and personal traits. For example, if you observe low motivation from a client, do not assume that he or she does not care or does not want to work hard. It may be the environment or a personal preference not being met. Also, do not assume that it is your style of instruction that is causing the lack of motivation, but use this as an opportunity to tailor your instruction and ask for feedback.

Number two, people have multiple motives for involvement. Because each person will have different

motives for participating in exercise, be sure to ask why they are participating, and revisit these motivations frequently. This will help stay on track towards goals and to adjust goals along the way.

Number three, change the environment to enhance motivation. Be creative while keeping a safe environment for your clients. Make sure that you are not becoming stale as an exercise leader.

And number four, personal trainers can influence motivation. The key is to remember that your actions can influence the motivational environment. Sometimes you may need to act more upbeat than you feel. If that is absolutely not possible, inform clients that you are not quite yourself so they don't misinterpret your behavior.

Building a rapport with a client does not happen overnight, and the strategies used to build rapport with one person may not work with another. Understanding the supportive role that a health and fitness professional can have will help shape the relationship that develops. The health and fitness professional can provide social support for physical activity by being informational, emotional, or appraisal.

Goal setting is important, in that a goal will help focus attention on a specific desired outcome. For quick and simple goal setting, the SMART goals schema can be implemented. The S is for specific. A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. Identify exactly what one wants to accomplish. For example, I want to walk 10,000 steps per day for the next four weeks.

The M is for measurable. Establish criteria for measuring progress toward each goal set. To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as, how much? How many? Or how will I know when it is accomplished? If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.

The A is for attainable. When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. A goal needs to be slightly challenging, but realistic.

The R is for realistic. Do not confuse realistic with easy. Realistic simply means that the goal is within the availability of resources, knowledge, and time.

And the T is for time-oriented. Goals need to be time-oriented. Set a time frame for the goal, such as for next week, in three months, or by my next birthday. Putting an end point on a goal gives a clear target to work towards.

One key to long-term exercise adherence is the ability to identify and overcome barriers to exercise.

Perceived barriers will vary among individuals, but one of the reasons that people struggle to reach their health and fitness goals is an underestimation of barriers, which can create a discrepancy between intention and behavior. This can leave a person feeling frustrated and defeated, and can lead to dropping out of an exercise program. Some of the common barriers to exercise are not enough time to exercise, lack of energy, my family and friends don't exercise, and boredom, or lack of enjoyment.

To summarize, when it comes to the psychology of the weight loss client, the role of the health and fitness professional is one of encouragement and support. It is important to demonstrate exceptional communication skills to assist the client with goal setting, strategize with the client to reach goals, and to provide a supportive environment.

At no time should a health and fitness professional attempt to diagnose or counsel a client with depressive symptoms, disordered eating, or other clinical challenges. By maintaining professional and appropriate boundaries with clients, the health and fitness professional can be an instrumental part of the client's overall lifestyle change.