

Non-hunger eating: The Eating Blueprint approach, part 6



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About this series

This article is the final piece in a six-part series that outlines a number of the psychological skills involved in the Eating Blueprint Starter Programme (Nash, 2016), designed to provide the 'psychological skills' to support traditional weight management advice. It continues on from the comment from issue 7 of this journal (pages 233–4).

Fritter

In other words, eating while you're doing something else, like watching films, on Facebook, or when you're faffing around doing something else (OK, I admit it, I've stretched the "F" theme too far there!)

Eating is enjoyable, as are films, Facebook, and getting things done (well, for some people anyway), so why dilute each experience by frittering away the enjoyment that's available for each?

Like each of these daily experiments, it may help you to consider whether you are "frittering" away any eating experiences:

- Eating while browsing online can be a nice way to pass some time, but what if you experimented with doing one before the other today?
- Popcorn and the cinema go hand in hand, but will you really notice if you ordered a small or a large once you're in the dark and the films started? (always made trickier when the large only costs a little bit more than the small!)
- Are you eating when absorbed in other daily tasks? Could you try getting a task completed and then sit down to savour the snack?

At the very least, just notice today the times when you're eating and doing something else. I think you'll find it interesting to see how often the experience is diluted when it doesn't need to be.

Forgiveness

It is common to not be kind to yourself when you get off track with your weight loss goals. I'm guessing what usually happens is something like the following:

1. Eat something that wasn't part of your diet plan...
2. Beat yourself up...
3. Feel bad about yourself...
4. Think, "What's the point?"....
5. And then eat to feel better or out of hopelessness that you will never change.

Contrast this for a moment with brushing your teeth. I'm guessing that you don't beat yourself up

if you:

- Run out of time to prioritise it some mornings
- Are too tired before bed occasionally
- Simply forget because you've got lots of other things on your mind some days.

You probably don't make yourself "wrong" for occasionally getting off track, instead I imagine you shrug your shoulders or have a similar sort of "that's life" reaction.

But here's where it gets interesting. If you look back over the last year or two of your life, you've probably been on track with your teeth brushing routine about 80–90% of the time (or more).

Contrast that with your reactions to getting off track with your weight loss goals:

- Get off track...
- Beat yourself up...
- Feel bad about yourself....
- Think, "What's the point?"....
- Eat to feel better or out of hopelessness that you will never change

So, the next time you get off track with your weight-loss goal, the invitation is to hold off on beating yourself up and instead consider the thought, "How would I react if this was me not brushing my teeth?", and see how your mind answers back. Whatever the reply that comes regarding brushing teeth, substitute that response with your off-track eating:

- Say "oh well" without blame or judgment
- Make an additional healthy choice later
- Think "I'll walk up the stairs today instead of getting the lift."

Freedom

We have a basic human need to feel free. Free to make the choices that we choose and we decide. Yet often we feel anything but free when it comes to our eating behaviour: "Eat this, don't eat that". What happened to our in-built capacity to listen to our bodies, eat what we need, and stop when we're full?

“Learned helplessness” is what happened. Forgive me for the jargon; I try to avoid the big words of psychology, but “learned helplessness” describes learning once that we can’t control something and then feeling hopeless; even if the facts are that we actually can control it. In other words, it is the false belief that we have no power to change.

The experiment here is to simply decide to be free of this. Decide that you have the power to create a different outcome for yourself around food. No matter what you believe right now, I believe it’s possible for you to feel free around food. I believe it’s possible because I’ve been in your shoes, feeling helpless and hopeless with my eating behaviour and powerless around food. I know that what helped me was shifting my focus from “out there” – the diets, the rules, the shoulds, to “in here” – my thoughts, my feelings, my decisions and my relationships. I started to feel in control and free.

All that is needed is some attention to your inner relationship with food, some strategies to do things differently, and a bit of experimenting with something new.

Fidelity

Do you think you’re a loyal person? A trustworthy friend? A faithful partner? A dedicated parent? A reliable employee? Most of us are, but are you loyal to yourself and the health goals you set? Do you make commitments to yourself about your health that you then break? Agreements that you know you can’t keep? Promises that set you up to fail?

If so, I understand. We are much better at keeping commitments to other people. Why? Because the world has required us to evolve this way. Trust and loyalty kept us safe in our unpredictable and often hostile worlds where we needed to show we could be relied upon.

But imagine if you could commit to your plans to relate to food in the same way as a parent, partner, or friend? How would your plans towards achieving a healthy weight change if you knew someone you cared about would be let down if you didn’t follow through? Would you create more realistic food commitments or say “no” to impossible exercise goals?

This is the difference between motivation and commitment. Motivation gets talked about a lot in weight loss, but I think it’s a bit of a red herring. Motivation is based on our emotions, and they

change every minute. It is commitment that is key, because commitment is based on a values-based decision. It is picking up your child from school even when you don’t feel like going out in the rain. Commitment doesn’t mean getting it right every time. Instead, it’s a promise to yourself that you’ll try your best, keep going even if you make mistakes, and not stop until you reach the finish line.

This is the personal development journey of weight loss, the bit that no-one else seems to be talking about in the food-weight conversation. It’s about valuing yourself and having the self-esteem to value your relationship with your inner world, your body, and weight in the same way as you value your children, partner, and friends.

Future

Future, or not paying enough attention to it. Instead, we want results today! Right now. Why? Because we’ve been promised that through “quick fix” diets and weight loss solutions, but what isn’t talked about (because it’s not very sexy) is that managing our weight is just like learning to drive a car.

When we first set out to learn to drive, we didn’t expect to be given a manual, read it, get the “head knowledge” and then be able to jump behind the wheel and be an expert driver. We knew that we had a process to follow, that we would have to translate that head knowledge into the skill of being able to competently apply it, and we knew we’d require coaching and guidance from someone with the skills to help us.

Just like mistakes were an integral part of learning how to be a skilled driver, “setbacks” and “slip-ups” are an integral part of your future weight loss journey. They need to be welcomed, not avoided. You need a safe environment to, as I like to say, “bring on the setbacks!” Learn from them and understand the difference between a lapse, a relapse, and a collapse.

So let today not be the end of the support you need to create success in the future. Let it be just the beginning! I’d love you to join me for the next step on your journey, in my online video, “Why can’t I just stick to a diet?” It’s my free gift to you. You can find out all the details and reserve your space by emailing hello@eatingblueprint.com with the word “Free Gift” in the subject line. I can’t wait to connect with you there soon! ■

About the Eating Blueprint

The Eating Blueprint is a “psychological skills” approach to weight management, equipping individuals with a simple-to-use toolkit of strategies delivered within an online/video programme.

The Eating Blueprint method was created by Dr Jen Nash, Chartered Psychologist. A recovered emotional eater herself, Jen has spent the last 10 years immersed in the heart and mind of eating behaviour, unlocking the missing link of her own food-weight journey, and she now loves nothing more than to inspire others to find theirs.

The programme is available for NHS commissioning or, alternatively, the strategies in this article are available as a book and accompanying online Starter Programme for £12. To access or for further information, please email: hello@eatingblueprint.com

For a free information pack, register your name and email address at:

www.EatingBlueprint.com



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Journal of Diabetes Nursing
19: 401–7

Available at:

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