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Solving problems

Plateaus and Problems in Weight Management

Everyone who attempts behavior change experiences a plateau at a time when progress seems to stall. You feel stuck. If your weight stays the same for several weeks regardless of your efforts, it's important to recognize the plateau and take action to solve the problem. It will also help you understand the possible reasons for a plateau.

One possible reason for a plateau is that your body has adjusted to the reduced calories and is using food more efficiently. This is the physical reason why weight loss has slowed or stopped.

Another reason may be that you have made a very subtle change in your food plan. Has a special occasion provided an opportunity to overeat? Has any life event caused emotional stress and overeating? This could account for 500 to 600 calories per week, which would be enough to stall your weight loss efforts.

A change in your routine may have influenced your physical activity patterns. This could also account for 500 to 600 calories per week, enough to make a difference. Have you taken a business trip or vacation? Has bad weather prevented you from being as active as usual?

You may be experiencing temporary water retention. Your body reacts to loss of fat and tissues by storing water in their place. The water will eventually pass and your weight loss will be more accurately reflected on the scale.

Keeping your daily diary and weekly progress graph up-to-date will help you quickly recognize a plateau. Even before weight loss stops completely, you may see a period where it slows down. A weekly change from one-and-a-half pounds to a half-pound could signal an upcoming plateau.

tools for success

- Identify possible causes for not translating knowledge into healthy behaviors.
- Use a problem-solving technique to identify a plan for resolution.
- Take at least one immediate step toward moving forward.

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2 Solving Problems

If you suspect you are heading for a plateau:

- Monitor your eating and activity very carefully for the next week.
- Compare your daily diary records to weeks when you achieved your goals.
- Try to determine the cause of your plateau.
- Use the problem-solving techniques introduced in this module to identify a plan for managing a plateau.

Personal Problem Solving

What is a problem?

A problem is a situation for which you have no ready response or solution.

What is problem solving?

Problem solving is a behavioral process that makes available a variety of potentially effective alternative for dealing with a problem situation. It involves creative thinking to generate a large number of potential solutions and critical thinking to develop the most effective plan for responding to a problem situation.

What is personal problem solving?

Personal problem solving is the application of problem-solving techniques to your personal problems. Personal problem solving may be used to assist you in developing successful strategies for managing your eating, activity, weight, health, and emotional well-being. Personal problem solving is an important part of your weight management program for three reasons:

- Changing eating and activity habits is seldom a smooth process. You will experience stalls, plateaus, barriers, and problems to solve.
- No one treatment or intervention approach is applicable to all people. Personal problem solving allows you the opportunity to individualize this weight management program to meet your needs.
- Solving personal problems in a systematic fashion is an easily learned skill and one

that can be used in other areas of your life.

Once you learn personal problem solving for managing your weight, you can readily apply the techniques to other behaviors.

What are the assumptions?

The way in which you approach personal problem solving influences the entire process. Here are the key assumptions:

- Problems are a normal and expected part of daily living.
- You can do something to cope with your problems.
- You are willing to assume responsibility for changing your behaviors.
- Problems are best handled as they occur, although acting impulsively is not always appropriate.
- Success is earned through trial-and-error and through persistence and patience in overcoming barriers to change.
- Evaluation of a solution is an important part of problem solving. Keep accurate records to track your progress.

A Model for Personal Problem Solving

Like personal problem-solving models, this one is based on the scientific method. You are encouraged to become a "personal scientist" as you confront your own problems. Learn the six steps and apply them to any problems that occur related to weight management or other aspects of your life.

Step 1: Defining the Problem

Unless caused by an unexpected event, such as an accident or a job transfer, lifestyle change is generally preceded by a sense of discontent with current circumstances. You may feel confused, frustrated, and anxious, making it difficult to isolate the true source of the problem.

Recognizing the problem is more than just

Changing **HABITS** — A Personal Problem-solving Strategy

This model is provided to help you structure changes in your lifestyle habits.

H — Hassled, harried and unhappy?

- Recognize dissatisfaction and associate it with a need to change.
- Look beyond your feelings of discontent with your current circumstances to the tangible causes.
- Determine “where you are” and “where you want to be.”

A — Analyze emotions, attitudes, and environments

- Identify emotional factors that trigger and reinforce behavior patterns.
- Explore the opposing emotions surrounding the question “to change or stay the same?”
- Examine routines, places, and people with whom you associate to better understand your current habits.

B — Break down barriers and brainstorm solutions

- List all possible solutions for your problem—be creative!
- Don’t prejudge any ideas.
- Anticipate the positive and negative outcomes of each solution.
- Choose the best solution—there is no perfect solution.

I — Involve others and identify a plan

- Develop a network of support through family and friends.
- Don’t depend on others for your success or blame them for your failures.
- Organize your plan into a series of action steps or “mini-goals” that can be easily achieved.
- Before acting on the plan, carefully evaluate it to be sure it’s reasonable.

T — Trial and error, try again

- No plan is foolproof.
- Activate your plan with enthusiasm, but anticipate setbacks.
- Old habits do not slip away easily; you must PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.
- When you make an error, evaluate what went wrong and learn from your mistakes.
- Try again and don’t give up.

S — Small steps build success!

- Believe in yourself.
- Believe in your goals.
- Consider every step that you make to be forward movement.
- Remember that the first step is the hardest.

Personal Improvement Plan

<p>H – Hassled, Harried and unHappy?</p>	<p>What is the general problem area?</p>				
<p>A – Analyze emotions, Attitudes, and environments</p>	<p>What patterns have I identified?</p>				
<p>B – Break down Barriers and Brainstorm solutions</p>	<p>What are potential solutions? How likely is it to succeed? (0=low, 7=high)</p>	<p>How realistic?</p>	<p>Ease of change?</p>	<p>Preference</p>	<p>Overall Rating?</p>
	<p> </p>	<p> </p>	<p> </p>	<p> </p>	<p> </p>
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	<p> </p>	<p> </p>	<p> </p>	<p> </p>	<p> </p>
	<p>Who will assist me with my plan?</p>				
<p>I – Involve others and Identify a plan</p>	<p>What are my goals?</p>				
	<p>I will try # ____ for ____ days/weeks. I will record the following information:</p>				
	<p>I will reward myself with:</p>				
	<p>T – Trial and error, and reTry again</p>				
<p>How successful was that plan? ____ (0=not at all; 7=very) I attempted the solution ____ times.</p>					
<p>I will therefore: retry, revise, replace the solution. (Circle one)</p>					
<p>S – Small Steps build Success!</p>	<p> </p>				

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admitting that a problem exists. You need to define the problem in very clear terms. It may be helpful to state the problem in terms of unmet needs rather than positive suggestions or solutions to meet the needs.

Effective problem solving and lifestyle change begins with formulating a clear definition of “where you are” and “where you want to be.” Recognize that being hassled, harried, and unhappy is not the problem. These emotions compound and mask the problem, often making it difficult to identify. Recognizing dissatisfaction and associating it with a need to change is the first step.

Habits and behavior patterns that are frequently repeated become involuntary, unconscious, and sometimes compulsive. Your perceptions, interpretations, attitudes, thoughts and feelings trigger and reinforce behavior patterns. Likewise, your environment influences how you establish your routines and habits. Problem solving requires systematic analysis to increase your understanding of “where you are.” Before you determine “how” you plan to solve your problem, carefully explore the opposing emotions that surround the question, “Will I change or stay the same?” Focus on reasonable solutions and actions.

Step 2: Generating Possible Solutions

After analyzing “where you are,” you will gain insights into how emotions, attitudes and environmental influences affect your current situation. Now it’s time to direct your attention to “where you want to be.” Keep in mind that your problem may have many solutions and that you may have to make many choices before you can move ahead.

Brainstorm a variety of solutions while resisting the temptation to evaluate them at this point. This step in problem solving requires that you use “right brain” processes. The right hemisphere of the brain is responsible for creative thinking.

Brainstorming is a spontaneous activity. Think creatively and see how many ideas you can come up with. Don’t eliminate any, even if they seem “wild” or unrealistic. Remember that there are probably a lot of different ways to solve your problem.

Step 3: Evaluation the Solutions

Although numerous and varied solutions exist, there may be no perfect solution to a problem. You must choose the best solution. This step in problem solving requires that you use “left brain” processes.

The left hemisphere of the brain is responsible for critical thinking. Explore the options that you generated through brainstorming. Sort the list of solutions, anticipating the positive and negative outcomes of each. Rank in order your solutions. Combine and modify the ideas listed to critically determine what will work best for you.

Step 4: Making the Decision

When you have identified a solution as the one that’s most satisfactory, it’s a good idea to picture how you will carry it out. Consider what the effect will be.

Often, support from family and friends is very helpful in brainstorming and critiquing solutions. Make your decision a team effort by involving others. Remember that you must make the decision; others can only guide, encourage, and advise you in your efforts. People will be more supportive if you maintain a balance. Include them in your plan, but don’t depend on them for your success or blame them for your failures.

Step 5: Implementing the Decision

Develop a plan of action. Organize the ideas and support you have generated into a series of action steps. Set goals and break them into “mini-goals” that can be achieved easily in a short period of time. Establish rewards for yourself and reasonable timelines for your goals and actions. This plan becomes the road map of “how” to get where you want to be. Before acting on the plan, carefully evaluate it to determine if it is realistic. This is where most plans fail.

Step 6: Assessing the Success of the Solution

Preparation can eliminate many potential pitfalls; however, no plan is foolproof. When you activate your plan, go forward enthusiastically, but anticipate that you will need time and practice to make adjustments and implement solutions. When you slip, don’t give up. Evaluate what occurred. Perhaps you need to give yourself more time. Maybe you need to readjust your problem-solving strategy. What did you learn? Each trial and error provides insights that strengthen the chance for long-term solutions.

Negotiating Agreements

Conflicts that involve others can sometimes be resolved by simply explaining how you feel and what you want. But if the conflict is ongoing, you may need to problem-solve and negotiate.

Here are some guidelines for negotiating with others:

Don't state the conflict in terms of nebulous gripes that both parties have with each other. Ask questions such as, "What specifically do I do that bothers you?"

Clearly describe specific objectionable behaviors and their effects, and/or give a positive suggestion.

State the problem in terms of unmet needs rather than positive solutions to meet these needs. ("I need everyone's cooperation to help me control my snacking," rather than "You need to cooperate...")

Involve both parties in the brainstorming process. Ask, "What ideas do you have for solving this problem?"

Evaluate the solutions by asking questions such as:

- "Are any of these solutions unacceptable to you?"
- "Which of these solutions would best help us both meet our needs?"
- "Which solutions do you like best?"
- "Which solutions do you like least?"

Keep in mind that listening carefully and paraphrasing can be helpful. Your solution is not the only worthwhile one. Try to give and take. Compromise doesn't have to result in bad feelings.

Avoid cross-complaining. List each party's complaints and deal with one at a time during the negotiating session.

Realize that you don't have to win every conflict to be OK. Not every conflict can or will be resolved.

Determine if the other person has the skills to engage in the desired behavior.

- Consider whether your expression of irritation is actually increasing undesired behavior.
- Listen, understand, and discuss rather than try to sell your point of view.
- Express empathy rather than irritation.

If the problem can't be negotiated, you can always take control by changing your environment or adapting to the situation. Plan out how you can take care of yourself and meet your needs without support, change or input from others. Let others experience the natural consequences of their behavior.

key goals

Using the tips in this module, develop 2 – 3 goals to work towards.

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