

JOURNALING TO EATING DISORDER RECOVERY GUIDE

PART 1

- goal setting
- the truth about dieting
- eating history
- preventing slips
- food beliefs
- managing emotions



Journaling to Recovery Workbook

"QUIET THE MIND AND THE SOUL WILL SPEAK"

A key part of healing your relationship with food and your body is to make time for reflection. Journaling has been found to be a beneficial tool in increasing insight into why your struggle with food exists and persists.

As you make your way through this workbook, you will deepen your understanding of how your food beliefs developed and why they sidetrack your ability to listen to your own body cues. Additionally, you'll see how these beliefs have impacted your body image and self-esteem.

CONTENTS - PART ONE

Chapter 1	Goal Setting
Chapter 2	The Truth About Dieting
Chapter 3	History
Chapter 4	Preventing Slips
Chapter 5	Food Beliefs
Chapter 6	Managing Emotions

CHAPTER 1: GOAL SETTING

Before you start this chapter and each thereafter, check in with yourself and your surroundings at this moment. Mentally, how are you feeling and are there any thoughts you need to put aside as you do this? Physically, is there any tension in your body? Take a minute or two to make any adjustments, do some deep breathing, light a candle, etc.

OK, now let's jump in! What changes do you want to make in your life? What are your goals for breaking out of your unhealthy relationship with food and exercise? Let's get concrete here. Not just 'I want to worry less about my food,' but what specifically do you want to change in your day-to-day life? How do you want to feel?

A good way to start so that you do not feel overwhelmed is to choose small, very specific goals with a short timeline, i.e. I want to go to bed 10 minutes earlier every night for the next ve nights. These are called SMART goals. You can learn about them more here:

<http://www.projectsmart.co.uk/smart-goals.php>

After you've written out your goals, write about why they are important to you. Is your desire to meet them internally or externally driven? What has gotten in your way in the past? Who else in your life might notice that you achieved your goals?

Lastly, keeping a clear schedule of your day will help to keep you on track. If you do not have one already, purchase a planner that is convenient to carry with you or use an online scheduler that you can access wherever you are.



CHAPTER 2: THE TRUTH ABOUT DIETING

When Dieting Becomes a Habit

Dieting-turned-habit is called restrictive eating, or starvation. People restrict their eating for a variety of reasons (not just concern about weight), and if you're a restrictive eater, it's crucial that you find out what motivates you. When you can understand why you restrict, you can find other ways to satisfy your needs. Common symptoms of restriction include anxiety, depression, social isolation, decreased concentration, and memory, loss of interest in activities, anger, mood swings, and insomnia.

Science of Restriction

In 1944, researchers studied the effects of dieting on 36 young men. During the first 3 months, the men were allowed to eat normally, during the next 6 months, they were put on a strict diet (normal caloric intake cut in half), and in the last 2 months, they were rehabilitated with normal amounts of food. During the dieting phase, food became the main topic of conversation, 13 men expressed a desire to become a chef and 2 suffered nervous breakdowns. The researchers also discovered that starving affected the men's body image:

- Men who previously had no problems with their appearance/weight felt overweight, even though they had lost weight.
- 4 weeks after the experiment, 10 men reported that they were dieting again because they were worried about their weight.
- 3 months after the experiment ended, 15 out of 24 men who were interviewed reported that eating had become a big problem even after their experimental diets were over.

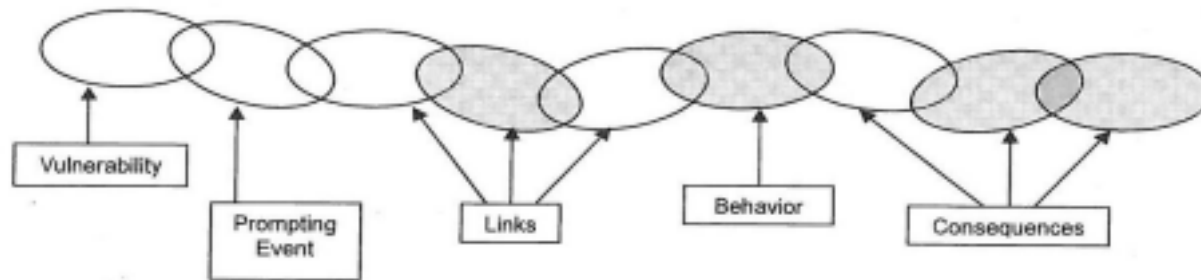
What's important to understand is this:

- Dieting behavior causes and reinforces negative body image.
- That's why changing your dieting behaviors is a critical part of this process. Changing your eating behaviors interrupts that thought-feelings-behavior cycle.

Even though you can't avoid these triggers altogether, you can make yourself less vulnerable to them. But finding new ways to respond to your triggers is the tricky part. You may have noticed that oftentimes it seems like problem behaviors just sort of happen to you. Your trigger happens, and the next thing you know, you're bingeing or restricting or compensating for the foods you've eaten. This makes it feel impossible to know what you can do differently the next time around.

And that's where The Behavior Chain comes in. The Behavior Chain helps make sense of the whole chain of events associated with your problem behavior.

There are 5 basic links to The Behavior Chain:



- **Vulnerability:** This is anything that might have made you vulnerable before your problem behavior happened. Vulnerabilities might be stress, lack of sleep, physical pain, drinking, drug use, etc.
- **Prompting Event:** This is the event that led directly to your problem behavior. What happened?
- **Links:** These are the many thoughts and feelings that happen as a result of the prompting event and the actions you took right after the prompting event. Consider in detail what happened right after the prompting event took place. What happened after that? And then what happened after that? And so on.
- **Problem behavior:** This is the behavior you're trying to change.

- Consequences: This is how your problem behavior affects you and others after you've done it. How do you feel afterward?
What do you think about yourself?

When you can identify each link in the chain, you have tons of new information about the situation. And new information means more opportunities to find better ways of responding to your trigger. In the future, try to do this as soon as possible after a behavior. It will help decrease any guilt, fear, or shame that may arise as well as foster a sense of control to get you back on track!

Journal Assignment: Take some time right now to think about your last disordered eating behavior. Put the frustration and/or judgment aside and try to identify each of the 5 links to the behavior chain analysis. Draw out an image similar to the one above or click on the following link to a worksheet:

<https://app.box.com/shared/pixtnr7btu>.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORY

This week, reflect on how & why your eating issues came to be. Every person has a different story, some can pinpoint a certain experience and for others, it is a combination of a lot of little things. Below are the common factors that contribute to the development of an eating disorder per the National Eating Disorder website (www.neda.org):

Psychological Factors that Can Contribute to Eating Disorders:

- Low self-esteem
- Feelings of inadequacy or lack of control in life
- Depression, anxiety, anger, stress, or loneliness

Interpersonal Factors that Can Contribute to Eating Disorders:

- Troubled personal relationships
- Difficulty expressing emotions and feelings
- History of being teased or ridiculed based on size or weight
- History of physical or sexual abuse

Social Factors that Can Contribute to Eating Disorders:

- Cultural pressures that glorify “thinness” or muscularity and place value on obtaining the “perfect body”
- Narrow definitions of beauty that include only women and men of specific body weights and shapes
- Cultural norms that value people on the basis of physical appearance and not inner qualities and strengths
- Stress related to racial, ethnic, size/weight-related or other forms of discrimination or prejudice

Biological Factors that Can Contribute to Eating Disorders:

- Scientists are still researching possible biochemical or biological causes of eating disorders. In some individuals with eating disorders, certain chemicals in the brain that control hunger, appetite, and digestion have been found to be unbalanced. The exact meaning and implications of these imbalances remain under investigation.
- Eating disorders often run in families. Current research indicates that there are significant genetic contributions to eating disorders.

Journal Assignment: Write your autobiography detailing the development of your disordered eating and relationship with exercise and your body. Think about when was the last time you felt accepting of yourself and your body, the first time you tried dieting, the first time you binged on food or exercise, etc. Please leave any judgments about these events aside as you write.

You can also get creative with this assignment and find music, poetry, a movie, or pictures that relate to your life story.



CHAPTER 4: PREVENTING SLIPS

I understand the desire to end the fix or cure for healing your disordered eating is strong. One of the most important keys to recovery is knowing this is a process. Beliefs, behaviors, and habits are not going to immediately stop. Trust that they will begin to decrease, but accept that slips will happen!

The techniques below help to prevent slips and remind you to keep your goal in mind. They are meant to be used at times when you expect to be vulnerable to dieting, restricting, bingeing, or other diet-oriented behaviors.



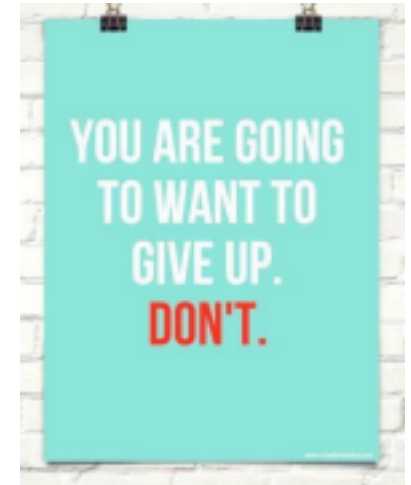
- Allow for Curiosity - Be curious, try foods you've never had before. Branching out and eating new types of foods will help you to break restrictive food habits.
- Eat regularly - Stick to a regular pattern of 3 meals a day and 2 snacks. This pattern helps your body to rebuild its hunger and satiation signals so that you can trust it to tell you whether you really are hungry. Starving yourself or eating until you're stuffed will confuse your brain and your metabolism. Your body is smart- if you eat regular meals, it will help you to maintain healthy eating habits.
- Never get too hungry - Don't let yourself get too hungry. By waiting to eat until you feel starving, you make it more likely that you will overeat or eat less nutritious foods. This happens because when you starve yourself, your body starts to think that food won't always be available and consequently craves very calorie-dense, unhealthy foods to sustain it.
- See it from 10,000 feet - Focus on the big picture. You don't need to focus on the details to have sustainable, healthy eating habits. Not every meal nor every day will be perfectly balanced, and that's okay.

Journal Assignment: What fears arise when reading these techniques? Can you try one or two this week? Journal about what you could see getting in the way as well as how you can hold yourself accountable.

CHAPTER 5: FOOD BELIEFS

One reason why changing unhealthy habits is so difficult is because the ideas, thoughts, or judgments we are exposed to get registered in our brains as 'facts'. When a person is struggling with disordered eating, their ability to fend off this desire to categorize food as good/bad, healthy/unhealthy becomes very difficult. In their attempt to keep things simple and in control, the more rules that are added create chaos.

It is likely that you have developed a complicated relationship with at least some foods that you currently or formerly liked, or even craved. It might be that you have made efforts to limit your intake of certain foods, to avoid temptation or losing control if you eat just a little. It may seem counterintuitive, but it is important to your recovery process that you begin to incorporate some of your feared foods into your diet.



Journal Assignment: Make a list of your food rules, for example only eating certain foods at certain times. Also, write out your feared or forbidden foods. Can you recall when these developed and how you learned to label them in this way? You may think you don't have many, but as you begin to write or think about this question throughout the week, more rules may come to light.

As you look at this list, what emotions are present? Consider letting these rules go. What are your fears about stopping dieting? What do you think will be the easiest and most difficult to change?

CHAPTER 6: MANAGING EMOTIONS

How aware are you of your emotions? Do you feel comfortable identifying your emotions throughout the day and managing your feelings? Lots of people feel like they're managing their emotions just by surviving them or waiting them out. Or by refusing to feel them at all. But managing emotions doesn't mean either of these things. It just means learning to keep yourself in your optimal range. That's the range of emotions you can feel while still functioning and thriving.

Some strategies for managing emotions are:

1. Self-Care: Having a good routine of self-care will help you keep your emotions in the range that works best for your life. When you're tired, hungry, run-down or generally unwell, it's easier for your emotions to slip into a range that keeps you from fully functioning.
2. Reduce events that set off unhealthy emotions: If you know what your triggers for negative emotions are, such as visiting a particular friend, going to certain places, etc., see if there's a way to try to eliminate those situations from your life.
3. Mindfulness of emotions: As you go through your day, be aware of how you're feeling. This awareness will help guide you towards actions that will help you stay in an ideal emotional zone. You may learn over time what it feels like before you get upset, and that could lead you to seek out a friend, leave a situation, or do something you enjoy to get you back on track. Also, this isn't something you achieve one time – it's a practice that one must continue to cultivate their entire life.

Negative
feelings
are wake
up calls

#TRUTHBOMB

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Journal Assignment: In what ways was expressing emotions modeled in your family? How did you show your feelings as a child and were they acknowledged (positively or negatively) or ignored? How do you express them now? What are your fears and/or concerns around increasing your awareness and sharing your feelings with others?

GOAL CHECK-IN

You are now halfway through the workbook! Take a moment to revisit, revise and celebrate the goals you identified in chapter one.

What, if anything has shifted in your thoughts and/or behaviors? How would you like to increase support or add accountability to your continued recovery practice?

CONTINUED SUPPORT

If you would like to receive more support like this through our newsletter and blog, you can [sign up here](#).

If you'd like to learn more about working with an Evolve clinician, you can visit our website [here to contact us](#).

How to Stay Motivated

Take it one day at a time

Surround yourself with positivity

Ask yourself what you want & make realistic goals accordingly

Believe in yourself