

Chapter 2: Social Work

This chapter provides support and tools for building a healthy relationship with food and yourself. It explores important topics like emotional and mindful eating habits, positive thinking, and celebrating non-scale victories. Your team is here to support you, every step of the way, as you work toward a happier and healthier you.



We are here to support your mental health and wellbeing.

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Section 1:

10 Steps to a Better Body Image

Seeing yourself in a new light

One handout cannot tell you how to turn all your negative body thoughts into a positive body image. But it can suggest healthier ways of looking at yourself and your body. The more you practice these new thought patterns, the better you will feel about who you are and the body you naturally have.

Here are 10 ways to help you see your body in a more positive light:



Surround yourself with positive people.

- **Appreciate everything your body can do:** Every day, your body carries you closer to your dreams. Celebrate all the amazing things your body does for you, such as running, dancing, breathing, laughing, and dreaming.
- **Keep a list of the top 10 things you like about yourself:** Think about things that aren't related to how much you weigh or what you look like. Read your list often. Add to it as you become aware of more things to like about yourself.
- **Remind yourself that “true beauty” is not just skin-deep:** When you feel good about yourself and who you are, you carry yourself with a sense of confidence, self-acceptance, and openness that makes you beautiful. Beauty is a state of mind, not a state of your body.
- **Look at yourself as a whole person:** When you see yourself in a mirror or in your mind, choose not to focus on specific body parts. See yourself as you want others to see you – as a whole person.
- **Surround yourself with positive people:** It's easier to feel good about yourself and your body when you're around others who are supportive. Spend time with people who recognize the importance of liking yourself just as you naturally are.
- **Shut down thoughts that your body is not “right” or that you are a “bad” person:** You can overpower those negative thoughts with positive ones. When you start to tear yourself down, build yourself back up with affirmations that work for you.
- **Wear clothes that are comfortable and that make you feel good about your body:** Work with your body, not against it. You deserve to feel great!
- **Think carefully about social media:** Notice when images, slogans, or attitudes make you feel bad about yourself or your body. Protest these messages by writing a letter to the advertiser or by talking back to the image.
- **Do something kind for yourself:** Take time to appreciate and care for your body. Take a bubble bath, make time for a nap, or find a peaceful place outside to relax.
- **Instead of worrying about food, calories, and your weight, spend your time and energy helping others:** Supporting other people can help you feel better about yourself. You can make positive changes in our world!

Section 2:

For Family and Friends

Supporting a loved one who has bariatric surgery

Bariatric surgery is just one step on the journey to better health. When someone has this surgery, they also need to make long-term changes if they want to lose weight and keep it off.

You are reading this because someone you care about is having this surgery. It's important to understand that you are a critical part of their support system. They are counting on you to help them make these long-term changes.

What can I do to support my loved one's decision to have surgery?

Sit down together and take the time to listen carefully. Be sensitive. Know that this decision was not easy to make. Ask them what they know about the surgery. Find out why they feel it is a good choice for them. If you aren't sure how to support them, ask them what would be most helpful.

How will bariatric surgery affect my loved one?

After surgery, your loved one may feel many positive effects. They may have more energy and more self-confidence. Once they heal from the surgery, they may be able to be more physically active.

At the same time, the changes related to bariatric surgery can be stressful and emotional. They may find it hard to stick to their new diet, an exercise program, or other lifestyle changes.

Many people use food to cope with their emotions. If this has been true for your loved one, they may develop problems after surgery such as drinking, drug use, gambling, or shopping. Your ongoing support after your loved one's surgery is vital. You can help them find healthier ways to cope with stress or strong feelings.

How can bariatric surgery affect family and friends?

When someone has bariatric surgery, it can be hard on their family and friends, too. To support a loved one who has this surgery, you might need to make changes to your own habits and lifestyle.

Be open with the person who had surgery. Explain that you want to help, but that you have feelings about making changes. Be honest about what you want and need.

We always celebrate with food. How do I support my loved one if their food habits have changed?

Many families connect over food. People often celebrate special events with big meals. Cooking, eating, and talking about food may be an important part of how family members relate.

Talk with your loved one about how your traditions can focus less on food. Ask them how they would like to spend the holiday or special event. It will be hard for them to give up old traditions. Make a list of ways to celebrate together that do not involve cooking or eating.

How can I communicate in a way that is supportive?

- Compliment your loved one when you see positive changes, and do not criticize them when they slip into old habits.
- Resist the urge to be the “food police.” Join your loved one in making healthier choices.
- Avoid making comments about weight after surgery. Many people do not feel comfortable having others talk about their weight. Be careful what you say.
- Try to focus on positive changes that do not involve weight loss or how they look. Help them focus on the positive steps they have taken.



Your support is vital when someone you love has bariatric surgery.

What can I do if they start to return to old habits?

It is important to understand these things:

- Surgery is only a tool to help someone maintain healthy eating habits and an active lifestyle. It can be hard to make all the long-term changes that are needed for successful weight loss.
- A bariatric patient might return to their old eating habits. This can happen as their body starts to adjust after surgery and they can eat more.
- Old habits do not just go away. It takes a lot of effort to change them. Think about your own habits and ask yourself, “Am I eating and behaving in a way that will support my loved one after surgery?”
- Talk with your loved one about your concerns without criticizing or judging them. Remember that they can get help from their bariatric surgery team. Encourage them to go to their follow-up visits and support group.

Your Support Plan

Use the spaces below to list 5 ways that you plan to support your loved one. Some examples are, “I will set a time with my loved one to sit down once a week and plan our meals together,” “I will set the table, including a small plate for my partner so that they always feel included at mealtime,” or “I will pick three days a week that we will go on walks together.”

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Section 3:

Emotional Eating

How to change the habit

Do you eat to feel better?

Many people overeat for emotional reasons. Bariatric surgery does not help with this type of eating. Learning to cope with your emotions in other ways will help you both before and after surgery.

This graphic will help you review when and why you eat for emotional reasons. What are your best ways to cope at these times?

I want to eat when I feel:

- _____
- _____
- _____

I want to eat when I am at:

- _____
- _____
- _____

What emotions tend to make me want to eat?

Where am I when I tend to eat emotionally?

What foods do I crave when I feel emotional?

What pleasant activities can I do instead of eating?

When I feel emotional, I often crave:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Instead of eating at these times, I can:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Emotions That May Trigger Eating

Do you tend to overeat when you feel some of these emotions? Circle the feelings that often make you feel like overeating.



Afraid



Confused



Surprised



Sad



Excited



Disgusted



Proud



Angry



Sick



Happy



Very Happy



Hungry



Lost



Shy



Sleepy



Embarrassed



Unhappy



Very Sad



Tired



Worried

You're on your way! Remember to reward yourself for trying new activities. What can you do to reward yourself when you have worked so hard to make a change? List your ideas here:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Section 4:

Mindful Eating

Benefits and a practice exercise

Benefits of Mindful Eating

- Mindful eating is about responding to your body's cues for hunger, fullness, and enjoyment of food.
- Mindful eating is gentle and nonjudgmental. The goal is to keep focusing on what your body needs and how you are feeling. Go at your own pace.
- Mindful eating encourages gentleness and self-acceptance. Accepting where you are right now is important to feeling better long-term.
- This exercise may be challenging at first, but it is simple and easy to practice. There are no special foods or fads. You pick the food.
- Mindful eating is a helpful tool that will support you for the rest of your life.
- It is based on research! Studies show that mindfulness helps you understand and manage your eating habits and impulses.
- It's for everybody. Mindful eating is great for anyone, including people who overeat, under eat, eat irregularly, and chronic dieters.
- Instead of just saying, "don't diet," mindfulness gives you focus and options for what to do.



Mindful eating is gentle and nonjudgmental.

Mindful Eating Exercise

1. **Choose mindfully.** Choose a piece of food that you enjoy — maybe nuts, fruit, a piece of chocolate, or an orange slice.
2. **Observe.** Describe it to yourself. What is the color and shape?
3. **Smell.** Notice how the smell affects you. Does it remind you of anything? What memories or thoughts does it trigger?
4. **Take time to taste.** Describe the way it tastes. Include your experience of the texture, spices, and flavors.
5. **Notice thoughts and feelings.** Pay attention to the emotions and thoughts that come to mind. Do you feel happy? Sad? Satisfied? Craving more?
6. **Chew slowly.** Notice how the texture changes.
7. **Follow** the sensation down your throat as you swallow.
8. **Practice** taking a mindful bite.



Choose a food that you enjoy eating for this exercise.

Section 5:

Non-Scale Goals and Victories

A self-care worksheet

After bariatric surgery, it is helpful to have goals that do not involve weight loss. For example, being healthier and able to be more physically active are just as important as numbers on the scale.

Non-Scale Goals

Take some time before surgery to think about what your *non-scale goals* will be. These are goals that are not related to the numbers on the scale. After surgery, be sure to celebrate your “non-scale victories.”

To set non-scale goals, think about the things you want out of bariatric surgery besides losing weight. Be as specific as you can! Some examples are: “being able to walk a 5K,” “better diabetes control,” or “better blood sugar management.”

Take time now to write down 3 specific non-scale goals for yourself:

1.	2.	3.
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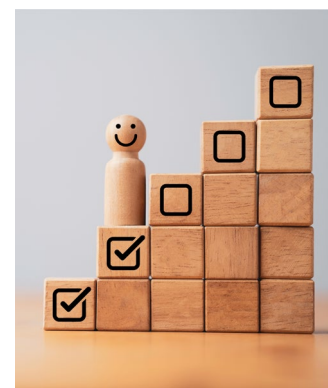
Non-scale Victories

It’s easy to forget the many positive changes that happen after bariatric surgery. Taking time to write them down can remind you how far you’ve come and how much you’ve achieved.

Some examples of non-scale victories are: “I was able to sit on the floor to play with grandkids,” or “I have been walking around my neighborhood every evening after dinner.”

Use this space to write down some non-scale victories after surgery. Celebrate your wins!

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----



There are many goals you can meet besides losing weight.

Section 6:

Positive Self-Talk

Helping yourself cope

We have all been through some very stressful times. Knowing that we made it through hard times in the past can help us deal with current problems. When you're stressed, using positive self-talk can help you cope. You can say kind, encouraging words to yourself and be your own personal coach!

Helpful Statements

Here are some things you can say to yourself when you're feeling stressed. Write down your favorite ones and keep them with you.

- Stop and breathe. I can do this.
- This will pass.
- I can be anxious/angry/sad and still deal with this.
- I have done this before, and I can do it again.
- This *feels* bad, it's a normal body reaction. It will pass.
- These are just feelings. Feelings are not facts, and they will go away.
- This situation won't last forever.
- Short-term pain for long-term gain.
- I can feel bad and still choose to follow my new and healthy path.
- I don't need to rush. I can take things slowly.
- I have survived before, and I will survive now.
- I feel this way because of what I've been through in the past – but right now, I am safe.
- It's okay to feel this way. It's a normal reaction.
- Right now, I am not in danger. Right now, I'm safe.
- Thoughts are just thoughts. They're not necessarily true.
- This is hard and uncomfortable, but it's only short-term.
- I can use my coping skills and get through this.
- I can learn from this and it will be easier next time.
- Keep calm and carry on.



The way you speak to yourself has a big impact on your mood and wellbeing.

Your Personal Statements

What kinds of stress have you experienced lately? Are there stressful situations coming up soon in your life?

In the table below, write down 5 examples of problems or difficult feelings that you have experienced or are worried about. Then choose a positive thought or statement for each one that will help you stay calm and cope.

Write these down on a small card. Carry it in your pocket or bag so that you'll have it handy when needed.



Write down the positive thoughts that will work best for you.

Hard or Stressful Situation	Coping Thought / Positive Statement
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Section 7:

Thinking Habits

Taking charge of your thoughts

Most of us have thinking habits that aren't helpful. This section describes thinking habits that can cause problems, and how to change them.

Once you know your usual thought patterns, you can start to notice when they occur. This is often right before and during stressful situations. When you are aware of your thoughts, you can challenge them. This will help you see things in a different way. Read the unhelpful thoughts below. When do you have thoughts like this?

Mental Filter

Our mental filter can make us focus only on what confirms what we already know. When this happens, we ignore anything that doesn't fit our usual mindset. This can be like looking through dark glasses, only seeing what we perceive as negative and not seeing things that might be more positive or realistic.



What to ask yourself: Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I ignoring the positives? Am I wearing “gloomy glasses”? What is more realistic?

Prediction

Prediction is believing we have a crystal ball and know what will happen in the future.



What to ask yourself: Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely is it that my worst fears might really happen?

Black-and-White Thinking

With this habit, we see something or someone as only good or bad, or right or wrong. We don't see any “shades of gray” in between.



What to say to yourself: It's not either all white or all black. There are shades of gray. What color is this?

Memories

Situations and events can trigger bad memories. This can make us believe that the danger is here and now, not in the past. This causes us stress right now.



What to say to yourself: This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it's not actually happening again right now.

Catastrophizing

When you “catastrophize,” you imagine and believe that the worst thing will happen.



What to say to yourself: Thinking this way isn’t helpful right now. What’s most likely to happen?

“Should” and “Must”

Saying or thinking “I should / shouldn’t” or “I must / must not” puts a lot of pressure on us.



What to ask yourself: Am I putting pressure on myself, expecting the impossible? What is reasonable to expect from myself?

Mind Reading

Mind reading is assuming that we know what others are thinking, usually about us.



What to ask yourself: Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What evidence do I have? Are these my own thoughts, not theirs? Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?

Judgments

We can judge events, ourselves, others, or the world, instead of describing what we really see.



What to say to yourself: I’m judging the situation or person. It’s how I make sense of the world, but that doesn’t mean my judgments are always right or helpful. Is there another perspective?

Compare and Despair

With this habit, we see only the good things in others. We get upset because we see ourselves as less or worse than they are.



What to ask yourself: Am I comparing myself to this person? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?

Mountains and Molehills

“Making mountains out of molehills” means making problems bigger than they really are, or not seeing possible benefits.



What to ask yourself: Am I making it worse than it is? How would someone else see it? What’s the bigger picture?

Critical Self

Self-criticism is putting ourselves down. We blame ourselves for things that may not be our fault.



What to say to yourself: There’s my inner bully again. Do people who really know me say that about me? Am I totally responsible for this?

Emotional Reasoning

I feel bad, so it must be bad! I feel anxious, so I must be in danger.



What to say to yourself: Just because something feels bad, doesn’t mean it is bad. My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts, and thoughts are just brain responses.

Section 8:

When We Were Young

A self-care worksheet

Caring for Your Needs

When we were young, our needs were simple. A child needs very basic things: sleep, food and fluids, play time, warmth, a sense of belonging and support, and help to stay clean.

As we grow older, some of these needs are neglected or even ignored. No matter your age, you need to take care of your needs every day to live in balance and thrive.



You can care for yourself now just as you were cared for as a child.

Checking in with Yourself

Ask yourself these questions:

- When was the last time I had a full, restful night's sleep?

- When was the last time that I felt as if I ate regular meals, nourishing fluids, and healthy snacks?

- When was the last time I moved my body out of joy and fun?

- When was the last time I had a sense of connection with someone I care about deeply?

- Am I noticing any changes in my digestion or bathroom routines?

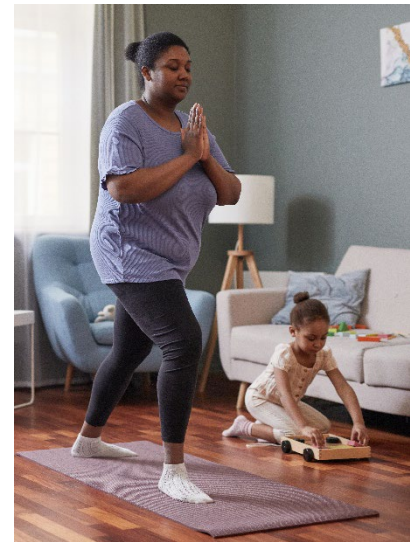
- Do I make time for fun activities? ____ Yes ____ No

If your answer is yes, name those activities here:

If your answer is no, please see the "Pleasant Activities" list on the next page for some ideas. Think about which ones sound enjoyable or interesting to you!

Pleasant Activities:

- Take a walk in a park you've never been to.
- Take a long soak in a hot tub, with bubble bath!
- Return to a hobby you used to enjoy or start a new one.
- Explore a museum, aquarium, or farmer's market.
- Write a letter to someone you would like to connect with again.
- Learn a new craft, like knitting, painting, or pottery.
- Play tourist in your own neighborhood. What would someone new to your area want to see?
- Spend time gardening or taking care of a small indoor plant.
- Listen to a new podcast or audiobook.
- Spend time with animals! You can visit a zoo or shelter, or spend extra time with your pet.
- Volunteer for a cause or organization that inspires you.
- Take a yoga or stretching class in-person or with free online videos.
- Host a game night with friends or family.
- Journal about the things you're thankful for or your favorite memories.



Trying enjoyable activities is a great way to take care of yourself.

What activities would you like to try? What are some ways you can take care of your needs and wellness? Try to list five ideas.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

If answering the questions in this section is difficult, or you notice you are out of balance in one or more of these areas, mindfulness and gentleness with your body might be just what you need.