

Module 7, Lesson 3 Handout:

Nutrition Planning For Psychotropic Medication Side Effects

Most anxiety and depression is treated with a combination of psychotherapy and medication. While psychotropic medications can work wonders treating mental illness, they often come with side effects - commonly appetite suppression or appetite stimulation from the medications. As a health professional, it's your job to help this client stay on track with their nutrition goals.

For clients who experience a loss of appetite on their meds:

- Suggest this client ask the prescribing doctor if he can time taking his meds around meals, especially if meds lead to feelings of nausea. For example, maybe he can postpone taking the medication until after breakfast. That way, he can get in a big nutritious meal before symptoms start to set in.
- Help the client find ways to eat even if his appetite is poor. He may still get blood sugar drops, which can make him feel depressed or irritable. Many clients find more success eating several small meals throughout the day. Collaborate and decide on a few go-to meals or big snacks that would work even if he doesn't feel like eating. Have these snacks be part of the routine and on the schedule. He may even want to set reminders to eat in his calendar if his natural hunger cues just aren't there.
- Find easy ways to add nutrient dense calories into meals. These clients may struggle with eating big volumes of food, so add in dense foods like nuts and nut butters, olive and coconut oil, grass fed butter, high quality meat and dried fruit (without added sugar). The key here is helping the client choose foods that bring solid nutrition along with the calories.
- Utilize smoothies. Many clients find it easier to drink something than eat something when they don't have an appetite. Come up with nutrient, calorically dense combinations including foods like full fat Greek yogurt, nut butters, avocado, spinach and fruit.
- Have the client plan for when the medication wears off and he feels ravenous! Maybe he doesn't have an appetite all day and struggles to eat, but suddenly 4PM hits and he's ravenous for a pound of pasta. Come up with nutrient dense options he can turn to for when his hunger finally kicks in.

For clients who feel hungry all the time or experience weight gain from their meds:

- Suggest the client speak with her doctors to find a medication and dosage that doesn't have this side effect if at all possible. There are a few out there that may be options and could be worth exploring.
- Work with the client and come up with a long list of nutritious and portion controlled things she can eat when she's hungry.
- Go for volume. Bulk up meals with vegetables to help the client stay full. A simple trick is to "flip the plate." For example, instead of a big bowl of pasta with some vegetables mixed in, think of it as a big bowl of vegetables with some pasta mixed in.
- Emphasize fiber. Fiber is key to staying full, so foods like fruits, vegetables and whole ancient grains are super important.
- Make hydration a big priority because hydration can often squash some of the hunger and help to not mistake thirst for hunger.
- See if the timing of the medications can be altered so that appetite stimulation is not going to hit when the client is most vulnerable. Suggest the client consults the prescribing doctor about this.

For clients who use food to manage their anxiety or depression:

- Remind the client that food isn't a cure. It may offer temporary relief but it's not the best way to handle mental health challenges. This may be an important time to refer the client to a therapist or other mental health professional as this isn't something to minimize.
- Come up with a list of non-food interventions to try before food. Plugging in deep breathing on a commute, using teeth whitening strips instead of a pint of ice cream while watching late night TV or occupying your hands with knitting instead of reaching for the potato chips can be therapeutic. Utilize the Triggers & Controls worksheet to help the client come up with individual strategies.
- Make a list of foods for coping to help in emergencies. The non food control isn't always practical - it's hard to knit at work, but it isn't hard to eat cookies in a work meeting, for example. Customize a food control for each client using the Triggers & Controls worksheet. Tea, popcorn, seaweed sheets, raw veggies, and frozen grapes are often effective suggestions. Tea is warm and comforting. Frozen grapes are icy, juicy and flavorful. Seaweed and popcorn offer the crunch and saltiness. Sometimes these nutritious choices will do the trick.

Clients who take psychotropic meds will typically have a team supporting them in their health. When possible, communicate with the doctor, therapist or other professionals the client is working with so everyone is on the same page. Dealing with the side effects of psychotropic medications can be a big challenge, and your role is to support this client, empathize with their struggles and help this person reach their health and wellness goals.

