

Module 7, Lesson 4 Handout:

Why Diets Fail & Successful Psychological Tools for Weight Loss

At any given time, more than one third of people in the United States are following some type of specific diet, and according to data from Food Insight, weight loss - above health or disease prevention - is the number one motivator. According to the CDC, nearly 50% of adults have tried to lose weight, but we also know nearly 40% of the country is obese. What's going on? The reality is, 95% percent or more of all diets fail, but this isn't necessarily at the fault of the client. There are *so many* reasons why traditional diets have failed us. Let's take a look at why.

Why Diets Fail

Our bodies weren't designed for diets. We were designed for survival, and our bodies are amazing at adapting to keep us stable. Traditional diets that restrict calories often fail us because our bodies learn how to go with the flow and adjust to the new norm. If we eat fewer calories, we learn how to survive with fewer calories. A study that looked at long term weight loss results in contestants from *The Biggest Loser* put this phenomenon of "metabolic adaptation" to the test, finding that after 6 years, contestants regained most of the weight they lost, partly because their metabolisms had slowed down. Participants were burning an average 500 fewer calories per day than researchers had estimated. Other research in the general population finds people who have lost weight experience a 3 to 5% drop in resting metabolic rate compared with people who haven't lost weight. We simply adapt to the diet.

Our brains weren't designed for diets either. We just discussed how our bodies adapt to dieting - well, our brains are in the driver's seat. Body weight is ultimately regulated by the brain, and it works hard to keep weight set at one point. When we start a diet, our brains respond through hormone regulation. Research finds when we cut calories and body fat begins to decrease, levels of leptin (the fullness hormone) decrease while levels of ghrelin (the hunger hormone) increase, which leads to increased appetite. That's the body's natural way of saying "Help! We're starving over here!" in an effort to conserve fat.

There's just too much diet info out there. In a survey from Food Insight, 80% of respondents said there's a lot of conflicting information about what foods to eat or avoid, making it hard for them to lose weight. There are countless fad diets out there that contradict one another, leaving people confused about what they should actually eat. Plus, fad diets are never tailored to the individual, and what worked for someone's friend or a celebrity won't necessarily work for her too.

Lasting weight loss takes time. Most diets are about quick results, not lasting behavior change. True weight loss takes time - more than the 30 days that some diets promise, and this frustration can

cause people to quit. Surveys have found 25% of people will give up a diet after four weeks. Other surveys looking at New Years resolutions have suggested this may be as little as two weeks for some to throw in the towel on weight loss.

Diets are not a realistic way to live. Our food supply and social lives aren't supportive of most trendy diets, and opting out of parties and events isn't sustainable for life. You can't be mentally healthy and on a diet for the rest of your life. Studies have linked dieting to higher rates of depression, in part due to the sense of failure and helplessness associated with dieting failure, and partly due to negative body image. We simply cannot live mentally healthy lives while we're constantly fighting a food battle in our heads.

Tools for Weight Loss Success

Despite all the reasons why traditional dieting fails, it *is* possible to see lasting weight loss results. Though every client's journey will be different and each client has unique needs, there are a few tools and strategies shared by successful weight loss superstars. Here's what they are:

Focus on behaviors, not food. Incorporate each pillar of a Nutritious Life in your work. Of course, talk about food, but also about hydration, activity, stress, sleep, environment, relationships and how your clients take care of themselves. Get a whole person picture of their health.

Find a motivation that really speaks to the client. Ask your clients how motivated they are and ask them what their expectations are, based on that level of motivation. Discuss these expectations, set goals and plan, based on where the motivation takes you.

Ditch the idea of deprivation and willpower. Willpower is innately negative and sets clients up to ultimately fail, and the feeling of deprivation can build up over time making clients want to give up. Instead, teach clients how to Eat Empowered. Talk about how they can fit their favorite foods into their plans in a controlled, conscious way. We'll get more into the skill of reframing willpower into Empowered Eating in Unit 2.

Remind clients that going off plan is okay! It's the Nutritious Life philosophy to be really transparent here. Your clients need to know they are going to be faced with real life, which may mean pizza, cupcakes or a glass of wine. That can work! Just because someone eats three slices of pizza for dinner *one night* doesn't mean they aren't the person who typically cooks a nutrient dense meal with veggies and high quality protein. Reiterate consistency. Enforce a "most of the time" mentality, where your client really sticks to the work you're doing together so much that it becomes a part of her identity, and this is still her identity even when dinner comes out of a takeout container.

Be patient. Clients can't expect the same weight loss every week, and neither can you as their main supporter in health. Hormones, sodium and even the weather can impact the rate of weight loss. Teach and preach patience and consistency. These are key to lasting success.

Sometimes it takes a lot of work to undo the diet mentality. Clients are going to come to you having spent years counting calories, believing fat is the devil or avoiding fruit because of the carb content. Build trust. Know the Nutritious Life philosophy works and offer your clients tons of support and accountability to help rewire their brains so they can lose weight and/or improve health successfully.