



# Is Mental Health the Missing Piece in Weight Loss Resolutions?

By Dr. Tricia Talerico, D.C., M.S., Nutr.

We are halfway through the first quarter of the new year and many of us are still excited about our ambitious weight loss resolutions. Gym memberships are up, we are filling our grocery carts with fresh fruits and vegetables, doing more meal prepping and watching our portion sizes. We may have even chosen to use one of the new weight loss medications or (preferably) some more natural supplements that help with appetite control. However, as the months go by, enthusiasm can start to decline. Why? Is it possible this may happen because we have not supported our mental health along the way on this challenging journey.

As a nutritionist who deals with clients who have weight loss goals, I find that one of the biggest problems is the setting of unrealistic expectations. This includes how much weight a person wants to lose and their timeline for accomplishing this. I do understand that we may remember how much we weighed in high school or before our first pregnancy or even before menopause. It's important to understand that life events and time may force us to re-adjust our timeline and expectations. Social media's portrayal of the "ideal" body can lead to frustration and disappointment when we are not progressing as fast as the "photo-shopped" pictures we see. Realistically, if a person loses 4 lbs of fat or 1% of body weight in a month, you are doing really well.

Identifying and addressing the root causes of our unhealthy eating behavior is very important and can help us to lose weight and sustain that weight loss. For example, if watching

television at night incites you to snack, then think about reading at night instead. Alternatively, you could have done your food prep and have some healthy options available to stop you from reaching for your kids' cookies.

Having a positive mindset and a big dose of self-compassion is also key to your success. Let's think of weight loss similar to climbing up a steep mountain. If we're not wearing hiking shoes or took a wrong turn on the trail, it may take us longer to reach the top, but we will still get there. As with weight loss, occasional setbacks will happen – it's pretty much guaranteed. Trying to look at these setbacks, not as failures, but as learning opportunities is really important. Boggling ourselves down with guilt, shame and embarrassment is definitely counterproductive! Practicing self-compassion may be new to us, but we can learn.

Setting up a comprehensive support system is something I encourage all of my clients to do. This may include a mental health

therapist to help with the emotional ups and downs of this journey, as well as to help you identify any emotional triggers that cause you to overeat or make poor food choices. A therapist can also help you to develop healthier coping mechanisms. You may want to recruit a family member, spouse, partner or friend who is also pursuing similar health goals. This would be a person with whom you can share recipes, words of encouragement and with whom you can be accountable. Working with a clinical nutritionist may also help you to devise an eating plan that fits your lifestyle and goals. A structured plan for exercise is also key to your success. You can join a gym, find a walking buddy, work out with a qualified Personal Trainer or even work out at home as long as you have the right equipment.

Weight loss is challenging and frustrating at times, but it is worth it to stay in the game, even if your progress is slow. Here's the thing, even small changes, if done consistently, can move you closer to your healthy weight goals.

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