

Self-Monitoring

The Missing Link to Managing Your Weight?

Learning Objectives

- What is Self-Regulation Theory?
- How is Self-Regulation Theory applied to weight management?
- What is self-monitoring?
- How does self-monitoring impact weight loss and maintenance?

Behavior Change for Weight Loss

- Most weight loss plans center on long-term behavior changes, often referred to as “lifestyle changes”
- Weight regain is a major problem for most people who successfully lose weight
- Once the structure and support from the program are gone, many people fail to maintain the behavior changes

Long-Term Behavior Change

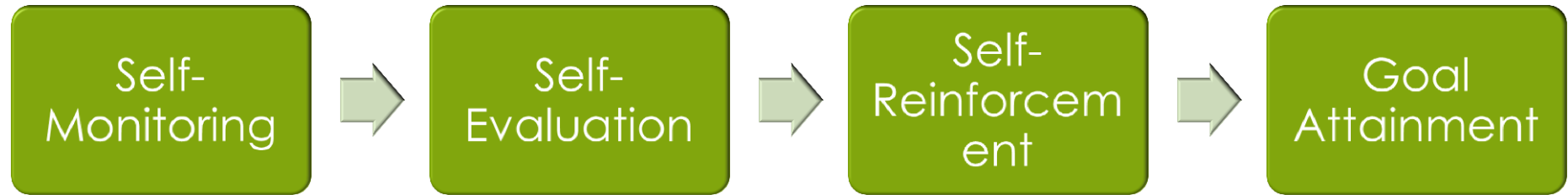
Pay Attention To:

Your own
actions.

Circumstances
that influence
your actions
and choices.

Immediate and
long-term
effects of your
actions.

Self-Regulation Theory



Self-Monitoring for Weight Loss

Compare current weight to goal weight and adjust eating and exercise behaviors or provide self-reinforcement.

Self-Monitoring Strategies for Weight Loss

It appears that the most important factors when choosing a strategy are that it can be used **consistently** and be an **early indicator of when change is needed**. It is less important how it is tracked^[1].

Most studies focus on self-weighing as a self-monitoring technique^[1].

- Exercise and/or food journal
- Weight tracking – can be tracking weight or body measurements such as waist circumference
- Can be paper- or Internet-based



Evidence for Self-Monitoring Success

- Studies suggest that self-weighing and self-regulation is associated with greater weight loss and reduced risk of weight gain after weight loss than control or other interventions that don't include self-regulation [1,2,3,5].
- Increasing self-weighing frequency was associated with less weight gain at a year follow up^[3].
- Regular self-weighing may indicate other behavior changes that promote weight loss or maintenance, but a decrease in self-weighing is independently associated with greater weight regain^[3].



Important Considerations

- Social inclusion and rewards impact self-regulating behavior. Therefore, in times of stress, exclusion, or rejection, the self-regulation necessary to maintain weight might diminish and health may be affected^[4].
- Perhaps frequent weighing wasn't the indicator or moderating factor for weight loss or maintenance in the studies:
 - Perhaps successful individuals realized they were gaining weight and made adjustments before much weight needed to be lost^[3].
 - Perhaps individuals who were gaining weight simply stopped weighing themselves^[3].
- Some worry that self-monitoring might lead to adverse effects such as preoccupation with weight or disordered eating. However, none of the reviewed studies found any adverse effects^[1,2,3,4,5].

Methodological Limitations

More research is needed.

- ▣ What is the optimal frequency and duration of self-monitoring? ^[1]
- ▣ Is self-monitoring effective in all sub-populations (most participants were white females) ^[1].
- ▣ Need to establish objective means to validate self-reported measures^[1].

Conclusion

- Mechanisms of self-regulation such as flexible dietary control and reduced emotional overeating associated with being active can contribute to long-term weight management^[5].
- Evidence consistently shows a positive relationship between self-monitoring diet, exercise, or weight and successful weight management^[1].

Exam Questions

True or False?

1. Self-Regulation Theory explains how to make short-term behavioral changes only.
 - ❑ False – it provides a framework for long-term behavioral change.
2. Internet-Based food journals were found to be more effective than paper-based journals.
 - ❑ False – no significant difference was found between internet- and paper-based journals.
3. Self-Monitoring is associated with triggering eating disorders, so it should not be used as an intervention for weight management.
 - ❑ False – while this is a concern for many, the evidence does not indicate adverse effects

References

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4. Baumeister RF, DeWall CN, Twenge JM, Ciarocco NJ. Social exclusion impairs self-regulation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.* 2005;88:4: 589 – 604. doi 10.1037/0022-3514.88.589.
5. Andrade, AM, Coutinho SR, Silva MN, Mata J, Vieira PN, et al. The effect on physical activity on weight loss is mediated by eating self regulation. *Patient Education and Counseling.* 2010;79: 320-326.