Enhancing Motivation

Introduction
Motivation is rarely static but changes over time. We can develop and lose it. Below are some motivational enhancement strategies that you can try all the way along your weight maintenance journey. It can also be a good idea to repeat these at various intervals, especially if you hit a rough patch and your motivation is challenged.

Exercises beyond the decisional balance
At your first appointment in the obesity service, you were given a decisional balance exercise to complete. This asked you to think about the reasons for and against changing. If you haven’t already completed this exercise or have not looked at it for a long time, then start by completing this.

Play ‘devil’s advocate’ to boost your reasons for change
List the reasons why you would like to lose weight and improve your weight management. Then take that list and really scrutinise and challenge each reason. Play ‘devil’s advocate’, arguing against each reason and trying to persuade yourself it is not important. See what you conclude.

By doing this you will really test your reasons for change. This is not about the number of different reasons but more about the strength or importance of a reason or reasons.

An example of playing ‘devil’s advocate’:
Imagine a person started listing the following reasons for wanting to lose weight and improve their weight management:

- to be healthier
- to be able to wear nice clothes
- so I can go swimming
- so I can play with my grandchildren

They then took their list and really scrutinised and challenged each reason, ‘playing devil’s advocate’.

Challenge/Devil’s Advocate: Why be healthier? Can’t you be healthier without losing weight?

Response to challenge: I want to be healthier to live longer, to enjoy life more. The best route to becoming healthier is to lose weight.
Further Challenge/Devil’s Advocate: You can enjoy life without losing weight. There’s no guarantee you will live longer; you might die tomorrow.

Response to challenge: I will certainly improve my odds of living longer if I lose weight.

Conclusion: The best way I can protect against premature death is to lose weight.

In this example for this person, the conclusion they reached was more powerful and harder to argue against than the initial reason they started with. The process really helped them see what was more important and less important for them.

They used the same process for their other three reasons and came to the following conclusions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original reason</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be able to wear nice clothes</td>
<td>To respect myself again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I can go swimming</td>
<td>To protect against premature death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I can play with my grandchildren</td>
<td>To feel proud of myself as a grandparent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using imagery

Sometimes our reasons for wanting to lose weight can somehow lose meaning. We can say what they are but we do not feel very inspired by them. Perhaps they have seemed out of our reach for too long or we don’t really believe we can achieve them so our reasons are just words - what we think we should say. If we feel like this, it might be a good time to get engaged once more with our reasons for wanting to lose weight and one way to do this is to use our imagination.

To do this, take your reason for wanting to lose weight, for example, to be healthier - and then really spend some time thinking about this. Think about how your health is currently limited by your weight. What does it feel like for your health to be compromised both physically and emotionally? Do you feel breathless? Is this scary? How is your poor health impacting your life?

How would it feel to be healthy? Can you imagine breathing freely or walking without pain (think physically and emotionally)? Spend some time on this image. What would you be doing? What would it mean for you? To make the image as real as possible consider various senses – what it would it look like, sound like, feel like, smell like, taste like? See if you can really imagine that you are in good health. How would your body be feeling? How would it feel emotionally? If a particular image or part of the image encapsulates or really sums up the sense of achieving your reason for change, then use this as a short cut in the future to boost your motivation.
For example, say a person did this exercise and for them one of the things they imagined would come with being healthy was being able to take a big deep breath and how this created a sense of being powerful and fit; they then could use this image of breathing freely to motivate them when feeling tempted to overeat. Perhaps they could contrast this with an image they created of themselves in five years’ time of having difficulty breathing as their health deteriorated.

By following this exercise of using imagery this person took their reason ‘to be healthier’ and made it really powerful and meaningful – it became about breathing freely and they could evoke how it would feel to be breathless and contrast it with the pleasure of breathing easily and deeply. Now, when in a tempting situation they felt they had a clearer choice to make between breathing or struggling for breath.

**Letters from the future**

Another exercise which uses imagination to enhance motivation requires us to be time travellers. This exercise helps us to focus on the likely consequences of successful weight maintenance and the likely consequences of not losing weight. Give yourself at least 30 minutes to complete this exercise properly. First imagine you are five years into the future, you have not managed to lose weight or gain control of your weight.

Now write a letter to someone - it could be yourself or a close friend, describing how things are. Include how your health is, what your weight is like, how you feel, what you are doing or not doing, what your relationships are like and so on. When you have written this letter, imagine yourself in five years time but now you have managed successful weight loss (be realistic) and have achieved successful weight management (you are keeping the weight off). Write a letter to someone describing how things are. Detail how you are feeling, how your health is, what your weight is like, what you are doing and so on.

After writing both letters, reflect on them and see if you feel any more determined to lose weight. Have any new reasons for losing weight come to light or any new disadvantages of not tackling your weight become clear? Which future do you want? Again, if a particular aspect of that future seems powerful, see if you can remind yourself about it every day so when weight management seems too difficult you are spurred on to not give up.

**Friend and foe letters**

This exercise also uses letters, but this time they are designed to help you understand the role of food and overeating in your life and reflect upon what you might be giving up for successful weight management. The exercise involves writing two letters: one to overeating as your friend and one to overeating as your enemy.
So in the first letter to overeating (your friend) tell them how they came into your life, what they gave you, how they helped, what they are still helping with now, how you would miss them if they left and anything else you might want to write. In the second letter to overeating (your enemy) tell them what they have taken from you, how they have been a negative influence, what consequences they have brought, how you do not want or need them in your life and anything else you might want to write.

Once you have written your letters reflect on what the experience was like. Did you become emotional? – Many people do. Anger is an emotion that can be elicited by this exercise; this can be highly motivating if you use the anger against over eating to make positive changes. Please do not waste the anger on things in the past you cannot change. What did the letters highlight for you? The letters can help generate or add to your decisional balance (pros and cons list).

**Flashcards**

The idea of a flashcard is to create an easily accessed summary of the conclusions you have reached throughout the motivational enhancement exercises. What this might look like depends on your personal style. If you like lists, then maybe you could make a flashcard that is credit card size with a few bullet points on it that you keep in wallet or purse and try and look at every day and when you are struggling.

If you prefer pictures, perhaps you will draw an image (or find an image) on a postcard which summarises your reasons for change, and which you can then display where you will look at it every day. Maybe there is a song which resonates or captures your reasons and will motivate you. You could play this every day or whenever you need a motivational boost. Of course, you could develop all three possibilities – flashcards, pictures and songs - and more. The more reminders and flashcards you have around you, the more likely your motivation will flourish.
We are now a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient-information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

Document history
Authors: Clinical Psychologist
Pharmacist: N/A
Department: Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ www.cuh.org.uk
Contact number: 01223 245151
Publish/Review date: September 2017/September 2020
File name: Ennhacing_motivation.doc
Version number/Ref: 1/100499