

# Recovery!

## *I am a frog!!*

Why can't I be a princess?

Self-acceptance. The more one reads about it, the more one wonders why it is that so many of us have come to have such low self-esteem, and how can we understand it? More importantly, how can we do something about it. Here are some suggestions.

### Step #1

Realize that the way you **think** about yourself is the way you will **feel** about yourself. Do you want to feel badly about yourself or do you want to feel good about yourself? That choice is up to you. Yes it is a choice.

### Step #2

Make the **commitment** to take control of your thinking. Perhaps you have been criticized and degraded for years by others and you have come to believe what they say is true. Or maybe you have been criticizing yourself for a long time. That causes certain thinking patterns to become "ingrained" so to speak in your psyche. It will take some time to change those thinking patterns, but with the will and determination, you can change those patterns.

### Step #3

Begin by journaling every time you have a negative thought about your body. Carry a notebook with you. Write it down every time you start to beat yourself up. What does your dialogue sound like? Where is it directed? When does it usually occur? If it occurs because you look in full length mirrors, try to cover those in your house up for awhile until it is comfortable to look at your body. If it occurs when you weigh yourself - you guessed it - throw out the scale or donate it to some second hand store. Can you start to predict when you will have negative feelings and head them off as much as possible (no it will not always be possible, but at least you can do some things to control some of the triggers). Are you getting sick of writing down the same negative obsessions? Are you ready to give it a break?

### Step #4

Get rid of all the clothes that fit too tight or that you don't feel great in. You can look awesome at any size if you find clothes that were made for you! You were not made to fit in the

Editors' notes.

In this issue we have tried to give some suggestions concerning the difficult issue of self acceptance. As this issue comes out just before Christmas, we have also included a short article on self acceptance and spirituality, written from the point of view of someone who has recovered from an eating disorder. This latter topic seemed in keeping with the Christmas season.

We have been trying to find room in past issues for an article on the mind-body connection, and we've finally managed to get the article in here. This general approach is one which we apply in much of our treatment here at Westwind, so it's a topic we feel strongly about. The problem-solving/skill building model is one that is so easily applied to many of life's problems today, and fits the needs of an individual struggling with an eating disorder quitewell.

As this year draws to a close, we at Westwind are grateful for the support we have received over the past year. Our approach to treatment is outside the mainstream with our emphasis on collaboration in goal setting with our clients, as well as using a less structured environment do to that in. Our de-emphasis on weight as an overriding issue is also outside conventional treatment models. Asking a person to gain weight and be weighed often seems quite contrary to what people trying to recover are repeatedly told - that weight does not matter. It doesn't matter. What does matter is how well you are eating, how comfortable you are while doing it, and how much you are enjoying your life. If you eat enough to

meet your daily needs, your body will look after itself and gradually move towards the weight that is healthy for you, the set-point weight that is more natural for your body. Trust your body - it will not betray you.

We believe in each one of our clients and their ability to recover. Thank you for believing in us this past year, and allowing us into your life to help you acquire some of the tools you need to continue that journey.

Wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

*Bryan Gusdal, MA*

*Barbara Hodson, R.D., MA*



This newsletter is a publication of the Westwind eating disorder recovery centre, and is intended for general information only. It is not intended to provide personal medical or psychological advice, which should be obtained from a qualified health professional.

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factory-made-assembly-line-cookie-cutter clothes that are on the market. Clothes should be made to fit you! Don't worry about sizes and numbers. Depending when you bought your clothes and where, you could have pants that are all the exact same fit ranging from sizes 5-11. So what does a number really have to do with size? All it does is help the store clerk to get you the one that fits you best! When the girl in the next fitting room asks for a size 1 - tell yourself, "she may be thin, but I have a life"!

If you are still having trouble getting motivated to change your thinking read on, the following steps might be the wake up calls that you need to help you get out of the rut you're in.

#### Step #5

Read books on the art of Renoir. Sit down in Chapters or Barnes and Noble with a cup of coffee and really look at the pictures of the women that he painted. Notice that the women he paints look at peace and relaxed with their bodies. They seem content and unconcerned with themselves or others. Their bodies are truly soft, voluptuous and curvaceous. They have the kind of body that our culture would despise. But something about their bodies is beautiful, soft and feminine. Wouldn't it be nice to be relaxed and accepting of our bodies the way they appear to be? Maybe if we lived at that time, we would feel proud and content with our bodies too. Isn't it sad how our culture has driven women to hate themselves and the **natural** soft curves of their bodies. What would you say to a young girl who was thin and yet hating her body for being fat and disgusting?

#### Step #6

Do you have the "WAWOPTOM" syndrome? Do you "Worry About What Other People Think Of Me" too much? You would be very disappointed to know that people didn't

think about you nearly as much as you hoped they would. Who are you really concerned about? Does it really matter what some stranger that you meet on the street thinks of you? You are probably thinking something "Oh my gosh, he must think I'm so fat, I'm so embarrassed" and you don't look up because you really don't want to be noticed. Meanwhile, guess what he is thinking? "Oh man, she probably thinks I'm such a loser with this ugly T-shirt" and he walks by without looking because he's too embarrassed. Both were so preoccupied with thinking about themselves that they had no reason to think about the other.

Then there are those who do make judgments about other people's bodies. What do you think of them as people? Do they show much respect to other human beings? Do you respect them? Do you really need their approval to be OK? Is it worth trying to meet their standards, or is it healthier to ignore them?

Why not try setting your own realistic standards of what you think is realistic for you to look like?

#### Step #7

Take an inventory of your genetic history. What was the predominant shape or figure of women or men on either side of the family? What traits do you tend to carry? Is there much you can do to remove those? Not likely. Can you maximize your good features and minimize the less accepted? Yes. One girl writes about how she had such heavy thighs that she hated them with a passion. She dieted and did all kinds of thigh exercises to slim them down. When she finally consulted a trainer, she found that in dieting she just made her upper body smaller, which made her hips and thighs look more disproportionate. The exercises she was doing, were actually adding to the size and muscle of her legs as well. He then helped her to plan a work-out schedule to build her upper body and do aerobic

activity to slim her legs. It didn't take away her genetic build, but it certainly helped her to become more proportionate and minimize the area she disliked (Anntonello 1996,p. 163).

Now that you've looked at your genetics and your own body build, list 5 things that you like about your body or more (yes you can do it). Then list five things you like about yourself. Display this list of affirmations on a bedroom mirror or somewhere where you spend some time each day and can read them often. This is all part of changing the way you think about yourself.

Now add to the list 5 things you would like to change about your body and 5 things about yourself as a person. Cross off anything on that list that is impossible to change - that needs to be accepted and embraced. Write out one positive thing about that feature. For example, height may not be changed and one positive thing is that you have a more commanding presence when you enter a room compared to a very small person. People notice you in a good way.

Pick one thing that is possible to change about your body (except your weight) and yourself and begin to change it. Imagine what a better person you could be

if you spent as much time perfecting your inner person as you did your outer!

#### Step #8

Ask yourself, "would I really hate my thighs so much if I lost one of them?" What will it take to realize that your body is not an object to be judged as beautiful or not. "It is the greatest instrument you'll ever own. Use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it or what people think of it" as Les Berman sings in "Free to Wear Sunscreen". Think about how grateful you are to have two arms that do all the daily activities of living. Thank God that you have two strong legs that allow you to run, shop, water-ski or play ball with friends on a Sunday afternoon. You have a body - enjoy it while you still can.

#### Step #9

This may or may not work as a tactic for helping you to put your body and its importance into perspective. Read with caution. We take no responsibility for what may result. It seems that when we are faced with a tragedy, life seems to take on a whole new focus and meaning. Either imagine that you found a lump on your body and with great apprehension, you went to the doctor and

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Obstacles are necessary for success. Victory comes only after many struggles and countless defeats. Yet each struggle, each defeat, sharpens your skills and strengths, your courage and your endurance, your ability and your confidence and thus each obstacle is a comrade-in-arms forcing you to become better....

Og Mandino

confirmed it was cancer. It has already spread throughout your body. There is no way to save you but the radiation and chemotherapy treatments will buy you about a year to live - 8 months comfortably. How will you live that last year of your life? What will be your focus and priorities once you accept the fact that you are dying and stop pitying yourself long enough to make a plan and take action to make the most of each moment. What is really important to you at that moment? What are the things you always wanted to do or experience? Who are the people that you love the most? If this does not work for you because you are suicidal to begin with, imagine this happening to someone who is very close to you, a spouse or family member. Where does your weight rank in view of this impending disaster?

The reality is, we are all dying, we just don't know when or how. It could be in a car accident next week or it could be when we are 87 and in a hospital bed. We only have a limited time to live this life. And we can only live each day once. What is really important to you? Do you need help sorting that out?

Take stock of the people who mean the most to you. Are you making the time for these people the way you want to be? Things can be replaced, people cannot. Make the most out of every opportunity you get to make memories and to touch people's lives for the better. They are the only things that matter. And you do too. **You** are more than your body.

Step #10 Begin again with Step #1

### References:

Antonello J., 1996. *Breaking out of Food Jail; How to Free Yourself from Diets and Problem eating Once and for all.* Simon and Schuster, New York.

## Food For Thought...

*Just why are nutritionists always telling us we need to eat breakfast - that it's the most important meal of the day? One important reason is that your brain uses glucose as its fuel, and when you awake, your blood glucose is at its lowest. Eating breakfast increases what your brain needs to function better. That fuzzy feeling early in the morning isn't always a symptom of caffeine deficiency, it's the signal that you need more fuel.*

*Eating cereal for breakfast is one of the few ways of ensuring enough fiber in your diet, and having milk on it is almost essential to get adequate calcium and vitamin D. Fortification of cereals has greatly increased their contribution of many nutrients to our diet. People who eat breakfast regularly generally also have better diets during the rest of the day, which tend to be lower in fat or calories and higher in many nutrients. If you choose to have cereal, it is best to choose a high fiber cereal, although any cereal is better than no breakfast. Toast and a spread of some sort can also be a good choice. A whole grain bread is best, being a better nutrition choice than white bread.*

*A recent study published in the Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine tested 100 kids in Baltimore and Philadelphia and found that those who ate breakfast had higher math grades and were less likely to be described as depressed, anxious, or hyperactive by teachers or parents. Earlier studies showed similar benefits for other age groups even when sugared cereals were the main part of the breakfast.*

*So, while any breakfast is better than none, try to choose the more nutritionally sound foods whenever possible. You're only going to have one breakfast to start your day, so you might as well make the most of it!*

# The Mind-Body Connection

The Mind-Body connection is a phrase we often encounter when we read articles on stress and stress management. Most people do not know exactly what is meant by that phrase, however, so the term often leads to more confusion than clarity. Basically we are referring to any method that uses our mind to influence our behaviour and how we feel physically. There is a special field of study called behavioural medicine that focuses on the effects of how our feelings are influenced by our thoughts, and how that, in turn, influences our physical well-being. Most of the focus of study in this field is on how the stress in our lives influences our health, and what kinds of methods other than surgery or drugs, can help us heal and cope.

The methods used are well known now in the field of stress man-

agement, and there has been considerable research to confirm the effectiveness of these techniques. So, just what are these techniques?

First, any technique that brings about a state of relaxation would be included. These range from progressive muscle relaxation training, meditation, yoga, prayer, mindfulness, self-hypnosis and deep breathing exercises. Biofeedback training can be included here as well as hypnosis, although those techniques may be extended beyond simple relaxation in the treatment of many conditions.

The effects are not just short term ones, but can give lasting benefits if prac-

tised frequently. Coupled with other self-care strategies such as nutrition, exercise and stress-management the list of medical conditions that can be helped with relaxation techniques is a long one. Hypertension, chronic pain, sleep-onset insomnia, infertility, psychosomatic illness, premenstrual syndrome, cardiac arrhythmias, anxiety or depression, migraine and cluster headaches are some of the conditions that have been effectively treated (Benson, 1996).

Second, cognitive behaviour therapy of some type is another proven therapy. Sometimes you may see it called cognitive therapy, or rational-emotive therapy. While

there are some differences between these schools of thought, those differences will not be all

that apparent

to the consumer (you). Basically, what you need to know, is that this approach asks you to challenge your negative or distressing thought and replace it with another more positive one. The goal is to change specific behaviours and/or attitudes by changing the thoughts, beliefs and patterns of action that maintain them. The method we use at Westwind includes having an individual shout STOP! when the distressing thoughts are taking over. (We don't recommend yelling it out loud though - yelling it to yourself works just as well, and people won't think you are strange! ) The next step is to take a deep breath and say a word like "relax". Having learned a relaxation skill is

*...what kinds of methods, other than surgery or drugs, can help us heal and cope?*

of benefit for this step. Next, ask yourself how realistic or reasonable you are being in this thought. What's the worst that might happen to you, and how bad is that - really. It helps us to recognize that we all have a tendency to get carried away with our worries sometimes, and this step helps us gain some perspective. Finally, you need to begin to generate positive counter thoughts to the distressing ones. This can take either the form of positive thoughts that are the direct opposite of the distressing ones, or the form of problem solving.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) has been found an effective treatment approach for a variety of problems, particularly anxiety and depression. It is a commonly used intervention in stress management. In treatment of bulimia, it has been demonstrated to result in a 65% positive outcome rate - a number that can be expected to rise as other modalities are added to it. It has a history of success in treating anorexia as well.

Third, there is a therapeutic approach called Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) that has a success rate rivalling the CBT approach in treating eating disorders. A part of this approach includes communication skill development - a skill that has been demonstrated to be effective in helping to cope with stress. A related skill that is just as important in stress management, as well as overcoming eating disorders is assertiveness.

Finally, the mind-body connection is evident in the effectiveness found in helping people cope better when using such coping skills as self-nurturance, seeking support, problem-solving, emotional expression and journaling. ( Domar and Dreher, 1996)

The skill development/problem solving approach is one that allows individuals to

strengthen their abilities to cope with the stresses life presents in a healthy manner, and relies on each person's unique style to implement those skills. All of the skills listed here can be quite effective in overcoming an eating disorder and taking control of your life.

#### References:

Benson, H, with Stark, Marg, 1996, *Timeless Healing: The Power of Biology and Belief*, Scribner, New York,

Domar, A.D. and Dreher, H , 1996, *Healing Mind, Healthy Woman*, Henery Holt and Company, New York.

### *Westwind News:*

*We have added to our website recently, by adding a list of books on eating disorders and related issues. This section of the website has active links to Chapters.ca, with whom we have affiliated for the purpose of offering this kind of service. The book titles can be viewed at our site, and clicking on a title will connect you with the Chapters.ca site from where you can order the book. Chapters has information on current prices (including sales and discounts) at their site, as well as information on the availability of the book. The best feature is that the prices are in Canadian funds, so there is no costly exchange to worry about for Canadian residents. US residents may often find that the price can be better (after exchange) than ordering from US booksellers.*

Our site address is:

[www.pagedepot.com/canada/westwind](http://www.pagedepot.com/canada/westwind)

## Thoughts on Self-acceptance and Spirituality.

If I could chart on a graph my level of self-acceptance over the years of my life, I think it would look something like a lopsided U. I don't remember hating myself or any part of myself until about age 9 or 10 when I started to develop early in puberty. It was then that I realized that my body was changing and I was becoming "different" from the other girls I knew at that age. So the graph began to decline rapidly at that time. By age 11 I had become very self-conscious and the teasing from boys who were also starting to notice my changing body, made life very uncomfortable and I just wanted to hide my body from everyone's view. It was from that point on that I found myself hating many things about my body and my self-confidence dropped dramatically. I went from being the most popular girl in grade four to basically a "nobody" in grade 7.

For the next 10 years the graph would appear to be bottoming out and just moving along at a low level. Those were years of fighting to learn about who I was, where did I fit in? What do I really want out of life? Will people accept me? Am I pretty enough? With all those self-doubts and turmoil that come with adolescence and early adulthood, it is very rare to find anyone who is totally self-confident and assured of themselves. When I do meet a young person like that, I wonder, what it is that makes them so different? How do they seem to come to peace with themselves and know who they are so easily?

In my early 20's I found one possible answer to those questions. I began searching for meaning and values for my life and found God in a new way. I began to learn about what it meant to be in relationship *with* God, not just knowing *about* God. Understanding who God is and why he created this big old earth and human beings helped me to understand that I am a very special and unique human being made in the image of God. When I realized this, it changed my perception of myself in a profound way. "If God made me this way, and there is no other person who has existed or who ever will exist who is exactly like me, then God must have made me this way for a very special reason" I reasoned. So instead of hating myself or worrying about what others thought of me, I began to learn more about who God created me to be and what my role or purpose for being here really was. This gave me a sense of "self-esteem", meaning and purpose, way beyond what any career, talents or volunteer activities alone could ever achieve. Now I had a real purpose to live, to get up every morning and to contribute to life here and now.

Since that time, the curve on the graph gradually began to go up again, and now it is as high as it ever needs to be. I'm not sure if that is partly just related to the maturity that comes with growing into adulthood and becoming more secure and established in life, or if understanding myself in relation to my Creator is what helped me to accept myself in ways so many others even at my age cannot. That doesn't mean that I think everything about myself is perfect, but it means that I am content with my body, my personality, and my values because I know that I have got all the approval from God I need, to feel good about my life and myself.

I am not saying that I no longer need to grow and improve my shortcomings, but I know that no matter how badly I fail at anything there will always be God's gracious hand of forgiveness and acceptance that helps me to get back on my feet again.

Knowing that God always accepts me, releases me to accept myself, and in turn, focus my energy on giving myself to others. That is part of the reason I celebrate the Christmas season, and thank God for the peace that He has brought to my life.