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**A step-by-step guide to reducing body & weight checking**

Weight and body shape checking (or avoidance) can maintain preoccupation with shape and weight and also reinforce self-evaluation based on controlling eating, weight and shape.

Common checking behaviours in people with eating disorders include: frequent weighing (perhaps many times a day), studying parts of their bodies in the mirror, looking closely at, or measuring, certain parts of their bodies, pinching their skin folds to check for ‘fat,’ and studying ‘wobbly’ parts of the body (e.g., thighs, flesh under the arm).

Avoidance behaviours are also common, and these include: not looking at themselves in mirrors or avoiding other reflections, not wearing clothes that show the shape of their body, not shopping for clothes, not weighing themselves, not touching their bodies, not seeing themselves naked, having only limited close physical contact with other people (e.g., having sex, kissing, hugging) because of their dislike of their shape.

Body checking or avoidance can be done unconsciously. That’s why it would be useful for you to become aware of, and monitor, anybody checking or avoidance behaviours over two or more days.

**Step 1;**

***Identify and monitor frequency of all shape checking and body avoidance behaviours***

Take a few minutes to write down how you might be checking your body shape and weight or avoiding your body and weight, and how many times a day you do this. Try to be aware of how often you look in the mirror (importantly, what you are looking at), or how you might be checking or measuring parts of your body.

Also, be aware of how you might be **NOT** looking at your body and engaging in some form of avoidance behaviour. Many people both check AND avoid!

**Step 2;**

***Choose 3 checking behaviours you would like to reduce***

To reduce your preoccupation with thoughts about your body shape and weight, you need to begin to reduce your checking behaviours. Then, once you have an awareness of these, you can clearly plan how you would try to reduce these checking behaviours. Here are some guidelines you could use:

* Reduce gradually your checking behaviours (e.g., reducing frequency of touching your hips by a third, to a half, then a quarter, etc.).
* Limit your checking behaviours - allow certain ones to be done only once or twice a week (e.g., weighing yourself only once a week at a specific day and time).
* Eliminate some checking behaviours altogether (e.g., stop checking for underarm “wobble”).
* Postpone checking behaviours (e.g., allow yourself to check or measure something only at a certain time of the day, such as between 5 and 5.15 pm. If you are tempted to check at other times, remind yourself that you will check later).
* You might need to put your scales in a cupboard (or give them to a friend to keep) and move mirrors, in order to break these habits.

**Step 3;**

***Make a list of body avoidance behaviours***

Remember that avoiding your body also maintains your preoccupation with your body shape and weight. While avoiding your body might help you avoid anxiety and distress, you are also not giving yourself a chance to find out whether or not your fears are really true. This, in turn, maintains your focus on your shape and weight.

To overcome this preoccupation, you need to face your body and your fears about what you might see or experience when you do so. As with the checking behaviours, you need to be aware of what you avoid doing and how uncomfortable or distressed you would feel if you could not avoid it.

Begin with making a list of how you might avoid looking at, touching, showing, or letting others see or touch, your body or parts of your body. Then, for each behaviour, rate how distressed you would feel, on a scale of 0 to 100 (100 being the worst you could feel) if you could not avoid it and how many times, on average, you’d experience this a day;

Here’s an example:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Behaviour** | **Distress rating** | **Frequency** |
| My partner seeing me totally naked | 95 | 1 |
| My partner seeing me with no top | 80 | 2 |
| Wearing a tightly fitted piece of clothing | 70 | 2 |
| Letting someone touch my waist area | 70 | 4 - 5 |
| Letting my partner hug me | 60 | 5 |
| Trying on new clothes in a private fitting room | 55 | 1 |
| Wearing a baggy jumper | 40 | 5 |
| Looking at myself in the mirror fully clothed | 40 | 10 - 12 |

Now you try;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Behaviour** | **Distress rating** | **Frequency** |
|  |  |  |
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|  |  |  |
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Once you have written out your list, it is important that you start putting yourself in these situations or carrying out the behaviour. Feelings of anxiety and discomfort do not last forever. **Your anxiety will decrease over time if you face the situation**.

You can start with those that are easier for you to handle, and then work your way up to more challenging situations or tasks. This will help you to build your confidence, get used to the situations, and to challenge your fears about each situation.

Repeat each situation or avoided behaviour a few times. It does not have to be done within a day or a week. Give yourself a period of time, e.g., a fortnight or a month. Rate your discomfort and anxiety after you have carried out the behaviour. By doing this in a structured and repeated way, you will be able to reduce your discomfort and anxiety in these situations over time.

**Tackling the issues head on**

Choose 3 checking behaviours you would like to reduce and write them in the box below. Write down the specific guidelines (see Step 2) you will use and then each day record the number of times you actually checked. See if the numbers go down as the week progresses.

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| --- |
| **Checking Behaviour** |
| **1.** |
| **2.** |
| **3.** |

|  |
| --- |
|  **Number of times checked** |
| **Checking Behaviour** | **Monday** | **Tuesday** | **Wednesday** | **Thursday** | **Friday** | **Saturday** | **Sunday** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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With each behaviour, write down how you think you managed it at the time and why you believe the behaviour occurred. What was your general mood during that time (discounting how you felt about your body in that moment)? For example, were you happy when you felt the need to check your weight or body? If so, why? Remember, our body / weight becomes the target of misdirected emotion much of the time. For many of us it is because we have grown in up an environment that has perpetuated this and or we have grown distant / distrustful from our body due to events / experiences in our life.

Your body is rarely the issue; identifying why we’re actually doing what we’re doing in that moment helps us to not only safeguard against these harmful behaviours moving forward but also better manage them at that time.

**Behaviour I will face**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **What I was feeling in that moment and how I managed the situation** |
| **Behaviour** | **1st try** | **2nd try** | **3rd try** | **4th try** | **5th try** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
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