

Can psychological treatment assist with overweight individuals?

Research indicates that our society is becoming progressively more overweight, in part due to the availability of more calorie dense foods and a decreased need to physically exert ourselves. What once required us to take action in order to accomplish tasks are now easily done in the comfort of our chair. Isn't it ironic that as you read this page, you are evidencing this phenomenon? It is imperative that our society be more aware of the medical dangers of overeating, being overweight, or becoming obese. There are increasing numbers of programs to assist individuals with weight loss and controlled eating patterns. Mental health professionals are being called upon more than ever to assist individuals with eating and weight disorders. The research has demonstrated that when one is assisted with their unhealthy behavioral patterns and attitudes toward food and body image, he feels a greater sense of personal satisfaction, improved self-esteem and increased behavioral performance.

Various forms of psychological intervention assist people who struggle with being overweight. Behavioral modification focuses specifically on making changes in a person's actions in relation to food and assisting the person in making adjustments to her physical environment and surroundings. Further, looking at habits and attitudes towards food are worthy of exploration. Cognitive behavioral interventions assist the person to examine entrenched and maladaptive thought patterns that perpetuate maladaptive eating patterns. Such treatments are often more effective when working in conjunction with a nutritionist or dietician who aids the person in meal planning and education regarding nutrition and physiology. Traditional psychotherapy encourages the person to examine food as a representation of relationships and the extent to which food serves symbolic meaning and function for the person. Until these unconscious patterns or approaches toward food are examined, it is believed that food will be too important from which to disengage, regardless of how maladaptive eating becomes.

Psychological treatment does not guarantee weight loss, but it assist the individual in making necessary behavioral changes that increase the likelihood of stabilizing one's weight. Parents are encouraged to discuss matters of this nature with their children or adolescents in a manner that is respectful and maintaining the dignity of one's son or daughter. Concerns should come from a place of concern and empathy and not of judgment or rejection.