

Self-Monitoring and Calorie Awareness

‘Self-monitoring’ means keeping a daily record (either written or electronically) of what we eat and drink. Alongside counting calories, self-monitoring helps us become aware of habits: increasing control over our eating. This helps stop automatic eating and guides our food choices. There are no forbidden foods (including chocolate and alcohol). The only rule is:

Everything is recorded

To calorie count you require a reference. This can be a book, for example Carbs and Cals by Chris Cheyette and Yello Balolia. Alternatively, you may prefer to use an app or computer program, such as MyFitnessPal. This can be used on your smart phone or on a computer.

Note the energy equation that MyFitnessPal uses is different to the one we use – so please use the calorie goal we gave you.

For more information on books to read or useful websites and apps, you can download the “Useful Websites and Reading” handout from the resource library.

A note about physical activity. Physical activity is important for weight management and offers all sorts of health benefits. When we exercise, we burn calories, but often we over-estimate the energy burned doing exercise and we forget that sitting and watching TV also burns calories. We advise that you do not include any calories burned to increase your daily calorie target; any physical activity is a bonus to help you achieve your weight loss.

Keeping Records

Keeping records as described above can have a life changing impact on eating. This works on several levels.

- **Limits Food Intake:** It gives control, whilst maintaining freedom of choice and helps us to see where our calories are coming from.
- **It is Flexible:** if we go over our goal on one day then we can compensate the next, or we could plan ahead and ‘bank’ calories for a special occasion.
- **Gives us Ownership:** we are the ones in control, no-one is telling us what to do. This is powerful as we develop awareness and begin to ‘self-correct’.
- **Helps to Separate Ourselves from our Behaviour,** so we can look at our eating more objectively: Choose a format that suits you e.g. a beautiful journal that will fit into a bag, sheets of A4, a small notebook to fit into a pocket, an electronic copy, or using an app.
- **Learn about Portion Sizes.** Weighing and Measuring food helps us understand correct portion sizes. To do this you need kitchen scales and a measuring jug, alongside a calculator and calorie guide.



- Change our Attitude: People who self-monitor change their beliefs about:
 - o Labelling foods 'good' or 'bad'.
 - o Shift thinking about your own ability, perception, and awareness.
 - o Any internal conflict you may have.

Losing Weight is Hard

It is hard. Losing weight involves a sustained change in eating. In the past we may have followed a "diet": keeping to rules without seeing results. The reason for this is we are not creating a calorie shortfall. We may be eating the 'right' foods but still too much of them.

Self-monitoring - even just for one week - will teach us how this process works.

Linked with weekly weight monitoring, self-monitoring helps us understand how our food intake, exercise, and our body work together.