

CHAPTER 5: MENTAL TOOLS

What are you eating over, or what's eating you?

Everyone said I appeared "profoundly introspective." Whether it was at church, a lecture, or with others and discussing their hardships, I was busy obsessing. Outside conversations would be numbed by my constant chant of my new diet. My "diet mantra" was the only wheel turning in my head twenty-four seven.

You can't have a successful food plan without addressing the issues you eat over. Unresolved issues will sabotage your diet. It's also ridiculous addressing issues while "intoxicated" (still eating over them). When we are "high" from our binges, we are just like a drunk who is intoxicated. It takes twenty-one days for sugar to detox from our systems, and it takes about six to twelve weeks for our hormones and brain chemicals to return to normal. So the right foods need to compliment a good recovery program, just like a good recovery program should compliment a committed food plan. Recovery is a term that simply means free from obsession and compulsive behavior. A recovery plan contains techniques that help you refrain from destructive habits. The Physical Tools help establish a healthy food plan and food choices so your body can react and respond accordingly. Foods can stimulate, enhance, or deplete important brain chemicals and hormones. In order for the Mental Tools to work best, you need Physical Tools as a supplement to create a balance physically and mentally. In other words, the Physical and Mental Tools need to work synergistically. The Mental Tools are reinforcement for the Physical Tools (your food plan). It is useless to have the "perfect diet" if you continue to sabotage it. These motivational techniques will make it easier to commit to your food plan, confront the issues you eat over, and replace the foods and situations that are triggers for diet sabotage. These motivational techniques will help you change your life choices and free yourself from destructive, obsessive, or compulsive patterns.

- 7 Mental Tools: motivational techniques that...
- + Help you learn to commit,
confront, and replace triggers (foods and situations)
- = **FREEDOM**: How to lose the obsession over your food and body

Denial and dishonesty are the reasons people continue to make the same mistakes. (Making the same mistake continuously, when you have a twin, is like déjà vu squared.) Denial makes it easier to be a victim. There is no responsibility when people choose to be victims. Rather than working on themselves, they can blame their diet or other outside circumstances. (Blaming my twin was like blaming myself—didn't work!). *In secrets lie sickness*. When people are unable to be honest and cling to denial, they are *unwilling* to change. Unwillingness is a sign that they are setting themselves up to repeat their mistakes. This is *premeditated* behavior. Insanity is described as doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. What do you think you've been doing when you continually buy into diets and diet aids?

There are three ways of looking at ourselves: one, the way we see ourselves, two, the way others see us, and three, the way we really are. (Four ways if you have a twin.) Food addicts (or any addict) use “magical” thinking to live in the past or future—never in the moment. They are either obsessed about their image without being able to truly introspect, or their denial and self-absorption leaves them with extremely distorted perceptions. Only through humility and willingness do we achieve some perspective on how we really are. The following seven techniques outline a process that helps develop our true selves and confidence. A sick person will confuse confidence and humility with grandiosity and insecurity. These Mental Tools help guide us to become the people we were meant to be. They will help someone live in the *now* gratefully, not in yesterday or tomorrow.

To begin a good self-help program, you need to learn two very important things: *Commitment and Sacrifice*. Most (food) addicts confuse commitment with obsession and sacrifice with deprivation. This is not what I mean by *commitment* and *sacrifice*. Regardless of how rigid and disciplined the diet or the dieter is, there is always some point when dieters break their word. That is why you first need to learn to commit in small ways. This way you build trust with yourself. First, commit to a simple, easy food plan. *Writing* down the commitment, is part of the Mental Tools. The Physical and Mental Tools should constantly change, sometimes daily. Circumstances, growth, and health will make change necessary. This is a daily ongoing process, rather than living for the end results. Your food plan and motivational techniques won't be perfect but should progress daily. Without commitment there will be *no* success at all. The ability to follow through has obviously been a struggle that leaks into all parts of the addict's life. Commitment is an exercise we need to practice and improve every day. These simple commitment exercises will teach you to follow through and finish what you set out to do. Sacrifice is not about deprivation. It is about learning to surrender old ways, including bad habits, unhealthy thinking, and ritualistic patterns. You need to let

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go of comfortable and familiar habits that brought you to this dilemma. Without sacrifice, commitments are impossible. In order to commit, we need to sacrifice old ways of bartering with fate (reckless living). In order for a commitment to stick, you may need to sacrifice (give up) “slippery” food, people, places, and things. These “slippery” things make you slip right back to old ways, including old eating habits. It’s important to sacrifice, or avoid these foods and situations, so you can focus on your commitment. It’s easier to *commit and sacrifice* when you do it one day at a time.

The Mental Tools will also help you learn to *confront* uncomfortable situations with easy writing exercises. The Mental Tools consists of trigger replacements for foods and situations that should be avoided. These techniques help prevent compulsive behavior. Having a physical and mental plan will give you *freedom* from your own self-will and obsession.

The object of the Mental Tools is to learn to put “deposits in the bank,” ready for an “emergency withdrawal.” Food addicts repeatedly make the mistake of setting themselves up physically and mentally. *Environment is stronger than willpower*. Every choice you make is a blueprint for future patterns. Applying and sustaining these Mental Tools makes it easier, so that you’re not open for *compulsive* “set-ups.” The Mental Tools eventually make it easier to make better choices, rather than giving in to the same uncontrollable urges. Most of all, the Mental Tools help make your life manageable. Act—don’t react.

The Mental Tools are broken up into seven daily, simple motivational techniques:

- 1) Buddy or sponsor support system
- 2) Daily journal of food plan and feelings
- 3) Trigger list: foods, people, places, and things to *avoid that day*
- 4) Replacement list: replacing the triggers
- 5) Leverage list: the disadvantages of sabotage and the advantages of abstinence
- 6) Gratitude list: five daily gratitude affirmations
- 7) Connect and contribute: giving, helping, and sharing which manifests success

- 1) **The buddy or sponsor system**: Find a buddy or sponsor to share your recovery and food plan with.

This support system allows the food addict to share their experiences, strength, and hope with another addict (preferably food addict) with the same goals. (A sponsor from any twelve-step program is helpful as well.) The buddy or sponsor cannot be a spouse or family member but must

be somewhat available for daily contact with you. If you can't see the buddy in person, use the phone or email. A buddy or sponsor system is important because you need to learn to commit to another person. It's best if this buddy or sponsor shares the same addiction as you, or at least the same recovery program. You don't owe this person anything except the willingness to work together for a healthy and manageable lifestyle. When you have a responsibility to another person (commitment), it will make the rest of the food and recovery program easier to commit to. Depending on the buddy or sponsor, it's best if you can share your other six exercises with that person as well. Your buddy or sponsor is not your teacher, parent, or food cop. He or she is there to listen while you share your feelings, progress, commitments, doubts, and slip-ups. Usually, it's better to choose someone who's recovered more than you.

One-on-one therapy is helpful, but sharing with another addict seems to make it easier to open up and not feel so unique. (Sponsors are also recovering addicts.) Most addicts feel they have "unique-itis," feeling they are different and alone. You aren't paying the sponsor or buddy for a service. The buddy also recovers through what you share with him or her. You can have several buddies or sponsors as well. This helps availability so that you can preferably speak with someone every day. I had several buddies and sponsors. Some were solely for my food program; others were for my assignments. Don't feel obligated to a buddy or sponsor if you feel uncomfortable or feel you need to move on. Don't try to impress the buddy or sponsor. Buddies are not there to judge you or give their opinion. Your buddy or sponsor is there so you can learn to be *accountable*. This way it's easier to honestly open up, *share* feelings, and refrain from isolation. It secures commitment.

Example I: Cindy shares her food plan with a few buddies and shares her feelings and assignments with a sponsor. She uses the phone or the internet if she can't be with them in person. Cindy has a great support system.

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- 2) **Daily journal:** Keep a daily journal and divide it into two sections:
 - a) food plan and b) feelings.

Prepare a writing journal that will be divided into two categories: food plan and feelings. The journal is a daily writing exercise that changes every day. No two days should be the same because we are looking for progress, not perfection.

- a) The first section of your journal involves your *food plan*. First write down every meal and snack that you commit to for that day. This will include your Eco Anti-Diet food plan, which you figured out from the questionnaire and quizzes in Chapter Three. It may also include allowed/

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disallowed eating. This is when you PLAN a “taboo” treat, at a certain time, in a certain amount. These treats are not normally on your food plan. Suppose you have a relentless craving. Rather than “blowing your diet,” have this occasional treat in place of a meal. This may include a sugar treat or animal protein that you are gradually omitting or at least limiting. Allowed/disallowed foods should never be trigger foods: Those should be avoided. Trigger foods, further discussed in assignment 3, are foods that cause non-stop bingeing. Let’s say it’s a holiday. You are in the mood for holiday treats. You may plan to have a certain treat (not a trigger), such as pudding in a small and normal portion. If you feel you need a certain allowed/disallowed meal or treat daily, it may develop into a trigger food, especially if you eat it compulsively (unplanned, non-stop bingeing). The motive should be to learn to eat normally (not compulsively) *without dieting*. You shouldn’t attach feelings of guilt to certain foods. This will further the urge to punish yourself by sabotaging the rest of your food plan. Instead, without denying yourself, plan this allowed/disallowed meal or treat at a certain time, in a certain amount. The planning and commitment lifts the obsession and urge for a non-stop binge. This is where your sponsor or buddy comes in handy. You should commit your food plan to one of them and include any possible allowed/disallowed meal or treat. Verbally committing to someone else will also help differentiate between an occasional treat or a trigger food. When you keep your word, it helps alleviate compulsive behavior. Commitment helps manage the obsession that creates the insanity (feeling out of control). Your meals may begin larger than normal or a with a few allowed/disallowed treats. The important thing in the *beginning* is to keep to your word and commit without eating trigger foods (creating a non-stop urge). You can still enjoy your food without “living to eat.” If you associate every holiday or event with food rewards, it becomes harder to break the food/body obsession. It’s best to write your food plan and allowed/disallowed treats *before* you eat them. However, if you happen to eat before you commit to your meals on paper, follow your meal with a written, detailed account of what you ate. It’s more important to be accountable rather than rigid. Knowing everything you eat has to be written down prevents compulsive behavior. Your Eco Anti-Diet is a guideline that teaches you how to eat. It’s not about perfection. It’s about progress. Makes sure today you are better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better than today, one day at a time. If you can’t speak with your sponsor or buddy, leave your food plan commitment in his or her message box or email. First write down your food plan and then commit to it with your buddy or sponsor.

b) The other section of the journal involves your *feelings*. You should write down all the feelings you have kept secret or have eaten over. Most people are in denial at this stage. You will use a *pen* rather than a *fork* to deal with your issues. This new way of opening up may be uncomfortable

at first. You may feel sad, silly, annoyed, or angry. These feelings are *real* and normal. Embrace them. This prevents you from using outside sources to escape from these inside feelings. Refrain from writing solely about food and body image. You have already spent too much time obsessing over these issues. The object is to free yourself from body and food obsession. Your food and body obsessions aren't real. They are symptoms of the real issues you have avoided for years. Writing down your experiences and feelings can be a relief. It's as if you are "detoxing" yourself of unhealthy secrets. You are getting rid of all the *crap* that was "constipated" in your deep emotions. Make sure this part of your journal is safe and private except for possibly sharing this with something like a sponsor. Refrain from "people pleasing" or validating your feelings with your sponsor. If you find you are writing about the same thing every day, then you are starting to obsess over it. Learn to move on and be open to all feelings rather than one person, place, or thing. You may include the same subject, as long as the feelings change. It's a daily growth development. Just go with the flow.

Example II: Cindy's Journal

a) *Foods: Just for today, I will commit to Eco Anti-Diet 5 (Rock 'n' Rotate), consisting of these foods...Today, at my sister's wedding, I will commit to replacing one meal with an allowed/disallowed snack, which will consist of one small piece of my sister's wedding cake and a glass of Champaign.*

b) *Feelings: The wedding buffet made me feel overwhelmed and anxious. Mom made me feel guilty. I don't want her to try to control me. My boyfriend didn't call me, which made me feel lonely and obsessive. I called my sponsor so I wouldn't eat over him. I didn't weigh or measure myself today, which is getting easier. Sometimes it's a struggle, but today I feel great that I didn't use food or my boyfriend to fix my frustration or escape my depression.*

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- 3) **Trigger list:** Write a daily list that is divided into two categories:
 a) trigger foods to avoid and b) trigger people, places, and things to avoid.

This is also a writing exercise that is divided into two categories: trigger foods to avoid and trigger people, places, and things to avoid. Write the triggers just for that day, one day at a time. Every day your triggers may or may not change. Gradually, you will have fewer triggers. Eventually, you will be free from compulsive behavior.

a) *Trigger Foods* are any foods that give you the feeling of being out of control. They are foods that seem to trigger a *non-stop* eating behavior. Initially, all foods seemed to be a trigger for me. Every day I would write down the foods to avoid. When you realize that there is *no* negotiation with these foods, it gives you a sense of freedom. Just for *today*, write the foods that you obsess over. This will help you let go of things you want to control.

Rather than postponing your new diet, postpone your trigger foods until tomorrow. Every time you practice delaying your triggers, you are releasing yourself from compulsive behavior and obsession. One day at a time, it becomes easier. Eventually, trigger foods won't be able to trigger you. This list will be like a homemade rehab for your mind. It's the insanity, not the food, that takes our minds hostage. Writing down the triggers becomes a relief and makes the food less powerful. People always ask me how I can deal with trigger foods, people, places, or things. This is how I did it. My homemade rehab prevented me from setting myself up for compulsive eating or behavior.

b) *Trigger people, places, or things* can “set you off” eating compulsively (bingeing, purging, obsessing, etc.). This is not an excuse to avoid responsibilities or things that need confrontation. An example of a trigger situation to avoid is weighing and measuring yourself or your food. In the beginning, both Shane and I had to avoid certain people, places, or things so that we could concentrate on recovery. It's not their fault or yours. Your feelings may be especially sensitive because you are no longer “numbing” yourself with food. It may feel different. Don't avoid the feelings. Instead write, share, and talk about these feelings. Sometimes you may need to confront someone. Regardless of what you do, don't avoid your feelings. Instead try avoiding the unhealthy situations that cause triggers. You need a healthy environment where you can recover from old habits. *Environment is stronger than willpower.*

For the extremely sick person, rehabs work well because everyone is surrounded by healthy people with mutual motives. You may need to avoid someone who has been your past “binge buddy,” sharing your mutual addiction or habits. Your trigger list may not necessarily change for a while, but it should be reviewed daily. Simply write down any person, place, or thing that draws you back to your addiction and bad habits. This could be an object, situation, circumstance, or possibly an event. For instance, an anorexic may feel compulsive when she buys a swimsuit. The triggers may include the swimsuit as well as shopping. Remember, this is a one-day-at-time program. An alcoholic may be able to be a bartender when he's achieved long-term sobriety, but not in the beginning of his recovery. It's the same for a food addict or body-obsessed individual. Surround yourself with a healthy environment.

Example III: Cindy's Trigger List

a) *Trigger foods: ice cream, chips with sour cream dip, chocolate-nut candy bars, cinnamon rolls, pancakes with whip cream, soda, hot dogs*

b) *Trigger people, places, and things: my ex-boyfriend, the yogurt shop (ice cream), joining a gym, going to the weekend beach parties.*

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- 4) **The replacement list:** Write a daily list that is divided into two categories: a) replacing trigger foods and b) replacing trigger people, places, and things.

This is a list that follows and replaces the trigger list. Again, this may not change daily, but it should be reviewed daily. Like the trigger list, the replacement list is divided into two sections: replacements for food and replacements for people, places, and things. You are essentially replacing unhealthy rewards and poor environments.

a) First work on the food replacements. Write down enjoyable but healthy alternatives that you normally don't think about when eating compulsively. These foods should be safe enough to store in your home or are simple enough to make. Basically these are foods that are good for you and enjoyable enough to replace a trigger food. Remember your goal is to enjoy eating healthy meals without compulsive behavior. The weight will drop off as the byproduct of continuous healthy behavior. Trigger replacements are not the same as allowed/disallowed meals. Trigger replacements are *healthy* alternatives to your trigger foods. They help prevent the urge to binge and may be incorporated into your daily food plan. Although allowed/disallowed meals are also planned at a certain time and in a certain amount, they are an occasional treat that is not on your food plan. Trigger replacements are *totally* health-generated. This will help you reprogram yourself to learn to *eat to live*, rather than *live to eat*. We can also train ourselves to enjoy foods that are good for us. By planning ahead, we can learn to replace the triggers that release the shame and obsession. Shame evolves to sabotage. A planned replacement gives a feeling of earning the meal. My triggers were cheese and sweets. Initially, I invented clever replacements for my habitual triggers. I ate them without feeling deprived. I found that yogurt with black strap molasses, nuts, and raisins replaced the desire for cheese and sweets, all in one. It was healthy as well. The replacement list must be practical. If you say *never* to your usual trigger foods, without some type of compromise, you *will* return to them. The compromise is the replacement. The trigger replacements *can* (if necessary) be incorporated into your Eco Anti-Diet food plan. Don't leave an open space for your deleted trigger foods or it's open season for a set-up to go back to them. This is to simply teach yourself that there are other enjoyable foods outside of your binge food routine.

b) Replacing trigger people, places or things is similar to food replacement. You simply find healthy alternatives to trigger people, places or things. It's a good idea, in the beginning, to refrain from or limit magazine ads or watching a lot of television. It's a new experience to refrain from succumbing to every desire, so don't put "slippery" ideas in

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your subconscious for now. You should discriminate by choosing what your subconscious absorbs. Do not abuse this opportunity by replacing one unhealthy situation with another escape. Escaping will lead you right back to compulsive behavior. Again, do not avoid the feelings—just certain environments that are triggers. The replacement should help you confront those feelings you are avoiding. Sometimes, watching a movie, reading a book, or shopping can still be a method of escaping those feelings. Replace a trigger person, place, or thing with something applicable that will invest in your growth. A person's replacement could be visiting a sponsor or therapist. Therapy should never be a negative dumping session. Recovery is about getting in touch with your feelings. Learn to be less affected without giving away your power (giving up). There is a big difference between giving up and surrender. Giving up is laced with bitter regret. Surrender is feeling of relief while embracing trust and gratitude. Try replacing a trigger event with a charity event or group therapy. Shopping is another escape from investing in your recovery (yourself). Those activities sustain a self-absorbed body obsession that eventually develops into shame. Addictive behavior will follow. You may want to replace a certain restaurant that serves trigger foods. Restaurants were difficult for me and had to be totally avoided in the beginning. If I was obligated to socialize at a restaurant, I would suggest an exotic restaurant that served weird and unappealing food. A lot of restaurants now cater to vegetarians and even vegans. Perhaps you may need to replace a restaurant with a compulsive overeaters' meeting. You will feel good that you are investing in your recovery.

Example IV: Cindy's Replacement List

Triggers	Replacement
<u><i>Foods</i></u>	
<i>ice cream</i>	<i>blended or whipped frozen fruit or frozen yogurt with fruit</i>
<i>potato chips and sour cream dip</i>	<i>sea-vegetable chips and avocado/bean dip</i>
<i>chocolate-nut candy bars</i>	<i>trail mix with carob chips</i>
<i>cinnamon rolls</i>	<i>sprouted cinnamon sweet bread w/o flour, yeast, sugar</i>
<i>pancakes</i>	<i>homemade French toast (sprouted) topped with berries</i>
<i>whipped cream</i>	<i>whipped cream cheese or soy whip w/o sugar</i>
<i>soda</i>	<i>sparkling cider or juice with carbonated water</i>
<i>hot dogs</i>	<i>tofu dogs on sprouted buns</i>
<u><i>People, Places, and Things</i></u>	
<i>ex-boyfriend</i>	<i>replaced ex's photos with pictures of puppies and kittens</i>
<i>yogurt (ice cream) shop</i>	<i>juice bar</i>
<i>joining a gym</i>	<i>join a women's or specialty gym with a friend</i>
<i>weekend beach party</i>	<i>recovery retreat, athletic event, camping, or charity event</i>

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5) **Leverage list:** Write a daily list divided into two categories: the disadvantages of sabotage and the advantages of abstinence.

On one side of the list, write down all the disadvantages to being “drunk” with your “drug of choice.” This will include your mental pain, health problems, and the havoc your poor eating habits has created. You need to remind yourself of what it was like when you were “intoxicated” and the insanity that went along with it. On the other side of the list, write down all the benefits of abstinence (freedom from bingeing, purging, dieting, etc.).

In order to change, you need to dissect your old habits and understand that they *don't work*. If you are still getting something out of your drug

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of choice, then you won't change. Leverage is moving away from insanity and pain and moving toward peace and fulfillment. Have you ever noticed most success stories come from a point of leverage? Successful people are driven from both a positive and negative side. They move away from pain or have a reminder of something they don't want to return to (poverty, pain, etc.), They are also focused on something they want or aspire to. I am so impressed by Olympic athletes who overcome an unusual circumstance, such as a handicap or tragedy that they use to propel themselves to the top. If we don't remind ourselves of the pain, we will soon return to it. However, if we concentrate on the pain rather than a "carrot" in front of us, we will return to pain like a bad affirmation. We need to teach ourselves that there is hope at the other end of pain.

It's been said that if people were to watch themselves on a tape, acting "drunk," they'd be less likely to return to that behavior. This is what leverage is for. Remember when your teacher or parent would tell you to write down all the advantages or disadvantages to something you were choosing? This is somewhat the same. Following a binge, I would ask myself why I couldn't remember the pain. Why did I solely remember the "high," which didn't compare to the pain? Part of the addictive nature (physically and mentally) is to forget the pain. Brain chemicals such as dopamine and serotonin, or hormones such as endorphins (love) and norepinephrine (fight or flight), are released when we experience a "high." The mere memory of using our drug of choice causes dopamine to secrete. This creates a memory of the "high," to be greater than any pain from the drug of choice. Mentally, we've trained ourselves. This is much like a Pavlovian conditioning (act or move by learned impulse). When certain feelings surface, we automatically turn to our drug of choice and use it for our survival mechanism. That is why it is important to reprogram your mind. Remind yourself that these symptoms will surface when you are detoxing. Detoxing causes cravings and withdrawals. Create new *tools* that will help prevent going back to the pain. You need to make an effort to write these down. During your "insane" moments (of cravings and withdrawals), your memory won't allow you remember this pain. Therefore, you need to write it down in black and white, daily! The painful memories may have been forgotten through "blackouts" and denial, but they will eventually be lifted or have little effect. This is why your pain list may change, daily perhaps.

On the other side of the leverage list are the advantages to being "abstinent" or "sober." You simply write what abstinence means to you, what it has brought you, or how it's helped you achieve your goals. This too can change. This is not a Christmas list. It's not about expectations or goals. It's about how the sanity, trust, gratitude, peace, and freedom have helped manage your life. Simply put, write the pain of your destructive and compulsive behavior on one side and the benefits of abstinence (abstaining from destructive behavior) on the other side. **Don't run from pain. Use it as leverage!**

As I've mentioned, this is not a superficial list. Don't write about a car you've lost or a guy you would want to date, if you lost weight. You can however, write about the money wasted on your drug of choice or how refraining from isolation has brought you new friends. My pain leverage was the memory of waking up bloated and loathing myself. Although my physical health was poor, my mental state was worse. That was enough for me. On the other side was relief from obsession. Because we are dictated by feelings, that's what you should focus on and write about. This list should include adjectives and adverbs, rather than nouns. This list can change when the feelings change.

Leverage: What it was like before "abstinence" (painful feelings) and what freedom from obsession feels like.

Example V: Cindy's Leverage List

What it was like when I was bingeing: I was extremely out of control. My life was completely obsessed with binge foods and places to eat them or transmitting them into a love addiction. I hated myself. Eventually, I didn't want to be around my "binge buddies." I isolated because I was embarrassed, ashamed, and felt hopeless. I'd always swear to another diet the next day. It was easy to swear off food forever when I was stuffed and sick to my stomach! I couldn't move or breathe properly.

What it is like now that I am abstinent one day at a time: I finally trust myself. There is a sense of relief and hope. I am free from the prison I made by obsessing over my food and body weight. I focus on other goals now that I have time away from worrying about food and diets. I feel energetic and I'm able to sleep normally. I don't worry about numbers on the scale, because everyday I have progressed. I have faith and I've learned to let go of "control." Maybe I'm not perfect, but for once, that's okay.

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- 6) **Gratitude list:** Every day, affirm five simple things to be grateful for. (Each day is different.)

This is a daily exercise that can be written or verbally affirmed. It's best to do this first thing in the morning. Humility goes hand in hand with gratitude. Gratitude is important for the addict because most addicts are blinded by bitter cynicism. They see the glass as half empty and think no one understands them. You take things for granted when you are ungrateful. My mother taught me that there is *no such thing* as being lucky or having continuously bad luck. There's only the ability to be open to seize a good opportunity in front of you. When you are negative, you are unable to see good opportunities, even if they are right in front of you. Negativity prevents you from living in the *now*. There are clues to continuous bad luck. Continuous bad luck happens to people who stay victims and want

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to blame their circumstances without taking any responsibility. Without gratitude, we can't find "sobriety," love, success, or peace. Because I grew up in a dysfunctional family, I operated best in a crisis mode. I seemed to attract crises, because that was when I would perform at my peak. Usually an addict's life is consumed with problem solving, because the addict is addicted to the highs of a crisis. Recovery is moving past the crisis and learning from it without blame so that you don't repeat it. This exercise seems simple or unimportant. On the contrary, gratitude is the gateway to life-change.

Everyday you are to **choose five things** you are grateful for. I'm not talking about superficial things or obvious things. I'm talking about simple pleasures we take for granted. When we are stuck in our food or body obsession, we never notice the greatest gifts of all. It could be as simple as noticing a bird singing outside your window, a clear sunny day, or a nice hot bath. When I was using my drug of choice, I never noticed anything unless it had to do with food or weight. Again, the gratitude list should be different every day. The object is enjoy the moment and to be aware of all the simple things we take for granted. This exercise actually causes the secretion of vital brain chemicals and helps balance hormones. Good affirmations and a positive mind have been proven to help a person physically and mentally.

Example VI: Cindy's Gratitude List

Every morning Cindy writes or says:

- 1) *I am grateful for my best friend's support.*
- 2) *I am grateful for a beautiful sunshine morning.*
- 3) *I am grateful for the opportunity to visit my ill grandmother.*
- 4) *I am grateful for the sweet smell of the flowers outside my window.*
- 5) *I am grateful for my kitty, who loves me unconditionally.*

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- 7) **Connect and contribute:** Daily simple and easy assignment It's not the quantity of what you give, but the quality. Meaning it's better to be sincere and simple rather than grand and righteous. What is your motive? Where is your heart?

Choose one of the following: a) one selfless deed or b) one group therapy or c) one spiritual gathering

When we are wrapped up with our self-absorbed diet and image obsession, we never bother connecting with others, unless they feed our obsession. During our obsession, we *use* or abuse people, rather than connecting with them. If we don't connect we isolate from everything but our disease. Relapses occur when we focus exclusively on ourselves.

As long as your main focus is on yourself, your obsession will be, too. It waits patiently, smoldering inside, until suddenly it blows up in your face! Have you ever noticed people who always complain about nothing? Although you may want to show them what a real problem is, they are so wrapped up in themselves they don't care. Addicts complain about everything except their addiction. The best way to "get out of yourself" is to reach out to someone else. But first you need to invest in yourself so you have something to offer. Incidentally, don't get confused with making contributions and people pleasing. People pleasers are people who have their own agendas. Their motive is their image. People pleasers don't get gratification from giving or doing for others unless it is duly noticed. They usually need to complain or announce their good deeds. People pleasers are insecure people who feel like they must "buy" their love. It's unhealthy to behave as a people pleaser or to be involved with one (further details in Chapter Nine). They enjoy being the martyr, victim, or the hero. I've noticed these people actually brag that they are people pleasers. Then again, that is their very nature: to be so self-absorbed they don't realize that's not something to brag about. Contribution, on the other hand, is about reaching out to others. This helps us realize we are not alone and not so different. Connecting and contribution helps lift the obsession so you can focus on something or someone else. For this exercise, there is a choice of three connect and contribute activities to do. Although any one of the three is to be done daily, the group therapy is suggested once a week. The three choices of connect and contribute exercises are a selfless deed, a group therapy meeting, or a spiritual gathering.

a) One selfless deed: This deed is simple and easy but should be anonymous, hence *selfless*. What I mean by *anonymous* is simply unannounced. Don't wear it on your sleeve. This small, simple deed should be without any benefit except feeling good about contributing. It could be as simple as planting a tree for the environment, helping a woman cross the street, or picking up trash in a park. It's extremely honorable to be a part of any charity or charitable event, as well. Just make sure for this exercise, that the motive is pure and not for your ego. If you love animals, as I do, there are numerous shelters and adoption agencies that could use your help. Helping an animal is practicing contribution with unconditional love, *especially* when you don't own the animal. Practicing vegetarianism for the sake of animals is a daily contribution to animals! A lot of people anthropomorphize their own pets (make the pet an extension of themselves). Owning a pet is rewarding because the pet is a part of you. Making your pet a family member is practicing unconditional love. Moreover, adopting a *rescued* animal, rather than buying a purebred, is notably honorable. Helping any animal that you don't own is the highest form of charity.

MENTAL TOOLS

This exercise will help you reach out, anonymously or to anonymous people, places, and things without trying to benefit from it personally. Your main motive is to help or benefit someone or something that is not attached to your ego. This will build your confidence, character, and outlook on life. The gift is yours when you learn to connect and contribute!

b) Group therapy meeting: This may entail a twelve-step meeting, outreach rehab meetings, some self-help seminars or classes, etc. The reason I prefer group therapy as opposed to one on one therapy is because you connect and contribute with other suffering addicts. By connecting this way (sharing your experiences, strengths, and hopes), you are contributing to others' recovery (hope, inspiration, motivation). This sharing process keeps everyone on the same level. It very inspiring to be involved in a therapy group that shares their courage, life stories, and support. It's very similar to a spiritual experience. For the person who goes through daily battles with addiction, one or more group therapy per week is best. It also helps you to learn to connect and contribute. (Further details about therapy and recovery programs are in Chapter Nine.)

c) Spiritual gathering: When I heard that any type of addiction was a sign of being "spiritually bankrupted," that was an insult to my personal spiritual quest. Well, think about it. All addictions are about *control*, and needing complete control means a lack of faith. I don't preach any type of religious preference at all. I've met some people who do not have a specific religion but lead a very spiritual life. They are beautiful people who enjoyed giving, helping, and sharing. True spirituality seems to be the way someone lives (by example), not what that person preaches. I think there's a spiritual quality to anyone who reaches out (connects and contributes) and shares non-judgmental love and empathy. It sounds simple but seems to be rare, even in the name of religion. Most people who attain lasting abstinence or recovery incorporate some type of spiritual program with their therapy. The spiritual paths that are not dictated by fear, guilt, and shame seem to be the most successful. They found what we addicts were looking for in our drug of choice: fulfillment, which is found in simplicity, not in outside circumstances. It's important for those who found their whole recovery through their beliefs to continuously attend spiritual gatherings. It surrounds them with the inspiration that they need to sustain their recovery. However, if you attend church just because it is an obligated tradition, that does not count. This is not about a spiritual image or impression. You need to experience internal spiritual awakenings that help with gratitude, trust, and obsession. The spirituality helps lift destructive self-will through surrender. Spirituality is a feeling and not an event. A spiritual gathering could be as simple as a meditation group. Whatever it is, it should usually be done with others, not alone.

Example VII: Cindy's Connection and Contribution

Monday: Took my neighbors' trash out because they were sick.

Tuesday: Went to twelve step meeting.

Wednesday: Fed a stray cat.

Thursday: Returned my grocery bags to be recycled.

Friday: Went to meditation group.

Saturday: Donated five dollars to children's fund (usually spent on junk food).

Sunday: Brought snacks to the church meeting.

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For best results, it is necessary to do these assignments daily for six to twelve weeks or when your food plan becomes "slippery." Once you have obtained a healthy relationship with your food and issues, you can choose to do these exercises when it feels necessary. I do many of these exercises automatically. I've cultivated good habits that reinforce commitment to my food plan and separate my eating habits from the way I deal with issues.

This completes the Mental Tools, which supplement your Physical Tools. I've been asked numerous times what my "trick" was for losing weight. Or how I freed myself from obsession and destructive behaviors. The Physical and Mental Tools are my methods. It took years of researching and experimenting to arrive at these Tools. I took every successful method from every food and recovery plan and made my own daily formula. If it can work for my sister and me, it can work for you!

Note: I do not endorse any specific religion or discuss my own spiritual path. My sister and I are unqualified to do so. I do believe, however, a successful recovery program entails some type of spirituality.