

We are not the 'food police'!

How often do clients think that they are going to be put on strict diet and eat bland food? Explaining your role at the outset will lay a good foundation for the rest of the consultation. Sample script: "Have you seen a Dietitian before? What was the experience like? I work a little different from a traditional Dietitian. I am not here to tell you what to do. My role is to outline what you could work on to improve your health. But I also can help you with how to make changes in a manageable and stress-free way, tailored to you. How do you feel about that?"

Assess the client before you assess their diet

Ask the client what they think are the main dietary issues before launching into an assessment. For example, it is not uncommon for a 'Yo-Yo dieter' to know more about calories than a new graduate Dietitian! Asking the client what they think are the main issues, will allow you to spend more quality time on the main issues impacting on their weight (e.g., binge eating at night) rather than conducting a 30 minute assessment. Chances are that the client will be more honest with you too! Sample script; "What do you feel are the main issues impacting on your weight?"

Pen Ownership

Inviting the client to write down their goal and action plan can increase their success rate up to ten times! Sample script: "That pen and paper is there for your own use if you come up with some good ideas. It is just a matter of remembering things when you leave a consultation."

Messy Head Syndrome!

How often do clients (and even ourselves) feel overwhelmed with the many changes that need to be made to achieve the clinical targets? Outlining general categories or areas to work on will help the client prioritise and focus on one item at a time. Sample Script: "Working on all of these issues is too much to consider in one go. Is there one area that you feel you would most benefit from working on?"

Assume unsteady until proven ready!

Make no assumption that just because a client has turned up to an appointment they are ready! It does mean that we have an opportunity to assist them with prioritising their health. Attending an appointment because the doctor or family member told them is not a powerful motivator! Ask the client what benefits they hope to get out of making dietary changes rather than simply telling them. This allows you to assess their knowledge and also increase rapport and trust. Sample script: "Everyone talks about the importance of managing Diabetes. But I prefer to ask you, what benefits do you hope to get from managing your Diabetes?"

Offer a Menu of Options

We all like to feel that we have choice. Being able to choose from a menu of options reduces resistance and increases client readiness. Rather than giving clients one option at a time, offer a menu of strategies or suggestions. Sample script: "Here is a list of low GI snack ideas. Would any of these options suit you?"

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!

Even if the client knows what to do, are they confident that they will go out and do it? Asking the client what may get in the way and what they need to do in order to achieve their goal will increase their likelihood of success. Scheduling in time for planning meals, grocery shopping and preparing lunch the night before work for example requires thought and planning. Sample script: “In summary we have spoken about a number of ways to increase your soluble fibre and reduce your saturated fat intake. How confident are you that you will be able to do the things that we have discussed?”

Portion Caution!

The body finds it hard to adjust to big changes so reducing food portions by 50% or more, for example, would be difficult to sustain. Encouraging clients to start off with making 10% changes (e.g., reduce carbohydrate portions at dinner by 10%) is more realistic and sustainable in the long term. Once they have adjusted to this change, encourage them to reduce by another 10%.

What you track is what you get!

Have you ever had clients bring their food diary back to a consultation and focus on the ‘bad days’ or even leave days blank. Tracking the negative behaviours only reinforces failure and encourages guilt. To encourage success, invite the client to highlight the positive actions that they have taken in their food diary. If the client is working on a specific behaviour (e.g., chocolate minimisation or increasing exercise) invite them to record the days that they achieve this. Congratulate them on their successes and ask them how they could continue to keep up the good work and/or do more of the healthy activities over time.

Trial and Error

Encourage a trial and error philosophy. Remind clients that it is not them that failed if a strategy has not worked. Sample script: “Remember if the strategy does not work it is not you that failed, it is just the strategy. So keep a note of what does and doesn’t work and we can discuss this at the next consultation”.

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