

To find out more about my therapy groups and workshops head to:
www.thebingeeatingtherapist.com

YouTube channel – The Binge Eating Therapist
<https://www.youtube.com/@TheBingeEatingTherapist>

Exercises and Resources

I wanted to collate and include a list of exercises and resources you can turn to for support as you move towards a new relationship with food and your body. Change often comes through new experiences, so if you are feeling stuck you can keep returning to this section and try one of the exercises. These are some of the exercises I use in my practice and some resources I recommend.

Gratitude list – perspective, body image, emotions

Sending your brain off to look for things to appreciate is an effective way to gain some perspective and is an excellent habit to develop. The more you do it, the easier it becomes, and you may find you start noticing things that make you feel good without even trying.

Have a notebook and pen beside your bed. Every night, before you go to sleep, write down three things you are grateful for. If possible, try to find things that happened that day. If it feels as if you've had such a bad day that you can't find anything, then go bigger and broader. You may be grateful for your home, job or health. Perhaps there is a person you are thankful to have in your life. Commit to doing this every day for a period of time and see how you feel. You could do a month, or you may decide to do it until you have filled your notebook.

Consistent gratitude practice can increase feelings of happiness and connectedness. To make this exercise body image specific, write down three things you are grateful for about your body. Many of these can be about what your body does or can do. Don't be afraid to shoot for the obvious here. Just

because your body has done these things every day for your whole life doesn't make them any less miraculous.

Mirror work – perspective, self-acceptance

Go look at your reflection. Make eye contact with yourself and really see yourself. Talk to yourself as you would talk to someone you cared about. Hearing our own voice and gazing into our own eyes can help us to feel more connected with ourselves. This can be a very powerful exercise; what do you want to tell yourself? Instead of just thinking about it, do it face-to-face.

Set an intention – post-binge, perspective, avoiding restriction

This one is especially good if you are feeling confused about what to eat or you have just binged. You don't need rules, simply an intention about where to put your focus.

You may set an intention to be totally present with your next meal; intend to pause, breathe and check in with your body the next time you eat. You may intend to focus on one of the intuitive eating principles, such as discovering your satisfaction or finding some joyful movement. You may work through the RALIC steps and find the right intention for you during the last stage (Choose).

I hate my...but...– body image, self-acceptance

When you notice you are saying mean things to yourself, add a 'but' on the end and find a kinder ending to the thought. This is not about arguing with your critical thoughts or trying to force them away (this usually doesn't work). It's making a conscious effort to create some balance to these thoughts.

If you catch sight of yourself in a shop window and think God, I look awful you can add a 'but' onto the end of that thought and find a kinder, more generous ending to that sentence. It might become God, I look awful...but my body feels strong. Or you may choose an ending that has nothing to do with your body at all, such as God, I look awful...but I'm doing well in my work project at the moment.

Guided meditations – post-binge, self-acceptance

There are so many great body scan guided visualisations out there. You can trawl through YouTube and try a few out. I like Yoga Nidra by Lizzie Hill (YouTube).

Spend time with yourself – perspective, self-awareness

Schedule some time to be with yourself. Walking is one way to do this. Leave your phone at home and walk for the sake of walking, just to be with your thoughts and check in with yourself, even if it's a quick lap around the block. If you are travelling around, take out your headphones or switch off the car stereo and see what happens. We live in a world that tends to chase quietness away, but it's in the moments of peace and quiet that we can hear ourselves and tune into what's going on inside us.

Keep a food diary – increasing self-awareness, learning hunger/fullness cues

Approach this one cautiously. Food logging can be closely associated with dieting, so I don't recommend it for everyone. Some people may find it a useful way to stay present with food, or may want to log how certain foods make them feel. When used well, food diaries can be a tool for increasing your self-awareness.

I highly recommend an app called Recovery Record. There are no calories or portion sizes, and you don't see what you ate earlier, unless you download the PDF, so it's less triggering than other food recording methods. There is also a space for comments so you can use a hunger scale or make a couple of notes about how you are feeling.

Journalling – self-awareness, perspective, intention-setting

Taking time to self-reflect and getting your thoughts out on paper can help you connect to your experience and find some perspective. You can simply pour out a stream of consciousness straight onto the page; this is a great way to clear your head. Journalling prompts are particularly helpful if you are trying to challenge or understand your thinking. You may want to journal while you are working through the RALIC method if you have the space to do so. Writing it out can help to cement the stages in your mind.

Here are some other journalling prompts you could consider using:

- What is the kindest interpretation of this moment?
- Write a letter of friendship to your body.
- What areas of my life are feeling like a struggle?
- What do I want my relationship with food to look like?
- How can I look after myself today/tomorrow?

- What intentions can I set to support me?

Plan a binge – self-awareness, emotional eating, breaking the cycle

This one is going to sound a bit strange, but hear me out. Try planning a binge. That's right, deciding beforehand that you will binge. Plan it the day before, not on the day. Write down when and where you are planning to binge, record everything you are planning to eat and make it generous. Planning food has always been associated with trying to eat less in the past; you believe that if you plan food, it should be because you are trying to be 'good', right? The thought of planning to binge in advance may feel very uncomfortable.

There is such a well-worn cycle to bingeing. You feel strong urges to do it, and experience a sense of being out of control. When it is planned and you do it, regardless of whether you feel like it or not, it's harder to go unconscious and you have a completely different emotional experience of bingeing. Being out of control doesn't come into it, so it confuses the cycle.

There is a lot you can learn about yourself through giving this one a go, so it's worth doing some journalling around the experience.

And-and – interrupting patterns, food choices

If you are experiencing an urge for a particular food you normally binge on, to help you stay conscious try having the food, but pair it with a nutritionally dense food that you wouldn't normally eat with it. This might look like having an apple and chocolate bar at the same time or eating raspberries with ice cream. This protects you against the deprivation reaction and brings a greater consciousness to your choices.

Books to read

Body Positive Power by Megan Jayne Crabbe (Vermilion)

Body Respect by Linda Bacon (BenBella Books)

Bodies by Susie Orbach (Profile Books)

Fat is a Feminist Issue by Susie Orbach (Arrow Books)

Health at Every Size by Linda Bacon (BenBella Books)

Intuitive Eating by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch (St

Martin's Griffin)

Just Eat It by Laura Thomas (Bluebird)

Shift Happens by Robert Holden (Hay House Publishing)

*The F*ck It Diet* by Caroline Dooner (Harper Collins)

The Willpower Instinct by Kelly McGonigal (Avery Publishing
Group Inc.)

Women, Food and God by Geneen Roth (Simon and Schuster
Ltd)

Crisis and Mental Health Helplines UK

Eating Disorders BEAT — The UK's leading eating disorder charity Adult Helpline: 0808 801 0677 (Mon–Fri 9am–8pm; weekends and bank holidays 4pm–8pm) Youthline: 0808 801 0711 Website: beateatingdisorders.org.uk

First Steps ED — Support for eating difficulties and disorders Phone: 0300 102 1685 Website: firststepsed.co.uk

Eating Disorders Support Phone: 01494 793223 Email: support@eatingdisorderssupport.co.uk Website: eatingdisorderssupport.co.uk

Suicide Prevention & Crisis Support

Samaritans — Available 24/7, 365 days a year Phone: 116 123 Website: samaritans.org

Shout — Free 24/7 crisis text service Text SHOUT to 85258 Website: giveusashout.org

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably) Phone: 0800 58 58 58 (5pm–midnight every day) Website: thecalmzone.net

SANeline Phone: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm–10pm every day) Website: sane.org.uk

Papyrus HOPELINEUK — For under-35s experiencing suicidal thoughts Website: papyrus-uk.org

National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK Phone: 0800 587 0800 (6pm–midnight every day)

General Mental Health

Mind Phone: 0808 808 4994 Website: mind.org.uk

NHS 111 — Mental health crisis line Dial 111 and select the mental health option — available 24/7

Childline — For children and young people Phone: 0800 1111 Website: childline.org.uk

YoungMinds — Parents helpline Phone: 0808 802 5544 Website: youngminds.org.uk