

AN UNHEALTHY HEALTHY IRELAND



MOTIVATION ASSIST

POSITIVE IDEAS ON WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

We have learnt a lot about health over the past five decades and, no doubt, huge strides have been made in prevention, detection and treatment of major, life-threatening illnesses. We are also aware of where we have gone wrong in the past, although these, sadly, seem to hit our consciousness when it is too late. Just look at how aggressively tobacco firms used to advertise, and the sea of change and knowledge surrounding smoking that now sees warnings on cigarette packages. It has taken decades but, finally, smoking rates have begun to decline in a meaningful way. Still, many thousands of smoking-related illnesses and deaths occur every year.

The time-lag that occurs in learning from scientists is evident in the climate change warnings that came two decades ago and were largely ignored. We fear that something similar is taking place within the area of weight loss and health. With so many invested interests in particular industries, such as the food industry, sometimes change seems to move very slowly. At Motivation, we can often feel frustrated and disappointed by health initiatives – mostly with the best intentions – that don't seem to take into account the most recent developments and scientific findings, or miss vital opportunities to educate the public about how to change.



Healthy Ireland Initiative

No doubt a considerable amount of work and research went into the government-led initiative, [Healthy Ireland](#), however we feel that some important issues have been overlooked. Healthy Ireland has an appealing and worthwhile goal, which is to create a society, "...where health and wellbeing is valued and supported and on everyone's agenda in a meaningful way" and we fully support this endeavour. Let's work together to make that a reality.



Key Messages we Support

We are on board with so much that Healthy Ireland promotes.



Healthy Diet

- **In terms of a healthy diet, the recommendations** include many steps that are rooted in sound scientific evidence in relation to our health, such as;
- **Eating more vegetables**, salad and fruit - up to seven servings a day (more on this below!)
- **Limiting intake of high fat, sugar and salt in food and drinks**
- **Reducing portion sizes:** we are also very focused on correct portion sizes – read our blog 'Time to Downsize our Portions before we Explode' [here](#).
- **Increasing physical activity levels:** we all know now know that this is an important part of being a healthy weight and is also a great stress management tool. Read more on this from us [here](#).



Losing Weight

- In terms of losing weight, the initiative recommends that people **do not just focus on the scales**, and we full support that (read more on this [here](#)). Like us, they recommend waist measurements as a tracking tool, but we go beyond that and also use a Tanita scales to display body fat. The initiative also includes a recommendation to keep track of your food intake. This is wise as the evidence backs it up as an effective weight loss tool. Read more [here](#).

Goals

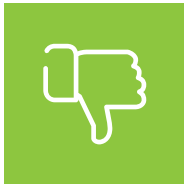
- The initiative also includes a recommendation that **planning and setting goals** is crucial to success and that rewarding your success will help keep you motivated.

Changing Habits

- The recommendation is to change **habits slowly and gradually**, and to not use the word 'diet', which is something we also recommend. In fact, we suggest clients [take one or two habits at a time](#) to work on.

When To Weigh Yourself

- The suggestion is to **weigh yourself just once a week**, which is a balanced approach we support (however there is no mention of body fat which we see as a missed opportunity – see below).



Missed Opportunities

The above is all wonderful advice, which we already deliver at Motivation. But, similar public to articles recently printed in the *New York Times* and [our own Irish Independent](#), the message misses the mark when it comes to weight loss as it fails to even register or disseminate crucial information regarding the basis of effective weight loss, as rooted in the science.

We feel that there is a missed opportunity here to educate the public on a number of key messages, one of which is the fact that a healthy weight can only be achieved when human habits, behaviours and emotions that cause the weight problem are first identified and then addressed (please see more on mental weight below).

Other oversights of the Healthy Ireland initiative include;

- 1) **Protein foods** (namely, chicken, meat, fish, pulses and beans) are particularly helpful on a weight loss plan for a number of reasons;
 - **These foods help keep us full.** Protein is more satiating than carbohydrate or fat. Therefore if your diet is protein restricted, you will tend to be hungry and will then tend to overeat carbohydrates (particularly those foods that are high in carbohydrates such as bread and pasta in an attempt to feel satiated rather than lower carbohydrate foods such as green leafy vegetables).
 - **These foods, if eaten regularly (every 3-4 hours) help stabilize blood sugar levels**, thereby helping to prevent cravings and binges that ensue due to physical reasons (low blood sugar), and

- **These foods help to prevent the muscle loss.** Muscle is a metabolically active tissue that helps to keep our metabolism revved and, therefore, is essential if someone wishes to achieve a healthy weight in the longer-term. In fact, 'sarcopenia' (the medical term for muscle loss which naturally occurs as we age) is often one of the main causes of weight gain from middle age onwards, yet many people do not know this. When we lose muscle, we tend to gain fat because the metabolism slows. If we can maintain, or even rebuild, some of that muscle mass, we will find managing our weight becomes a lot easier.

2) Secondly, we disagree with the approach to **carbohydrate foods** (including even fruit). We believe that, for the duration of weight loss (and particularly at the beginning of the weight loss journey), these foods should be consumed in moderation during a weight loss programme for a number of reasons;

- **More hunger:** when the body is low on carbs, it will use fat and protein as an energy source, and does so rather effectively.
- **More hunger:** eating carbohydrates doesn't seem to stimulate the appetite-suppressing hormone **leptin** as effectively as fat and protein do, so relying on a high carbohydrate diet will actually make you more hungry (and who enjoys being hungry while trying to lose weight?).
- **Constant cravings:** refined carbs (white bread, pastries or baguettes for instance) lack essential nutrients such as fibre, protein, and healthy fats, and instead fuel the body with fast calories and sugar highs. If the body is lacking nutrients, it will never feel full and satisfied, thus the constant cravings.
- **Blood sugar rollercoaster:** eating too many refined carbohydrates (and sugar) can cause a sugar 'rollercoaster' for many of us. What this essentially means is that our blood sugar levels rise rapidly, followed by a sudden drop (and it's during this 'drop' that you can turn to the wrong foods in attempt to fix how you are feeling, which is tired, shaky and irritable).
- **Too much insulin:** the more sugar that hits your bloodstream at any given time, the more insulin is required. Too much circulating insulin promotes fat storage and makes it hard for you to burn the fat you already have. That can be unhealthy if you're already carrying a few extra pounds. But, even more seriously, over time, an overproduction of insulin can predispose you to lowered immunity, insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and hypertension.

- **A cause of inflammation:** in terms of general health, some researchers also believe that too much added sugar and too many refined carbohydrates causes inflammation in our bodies. Over time, the inflammation caused by poor dietary habits may lead to several health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, liver disease and cancer.

3) **Body composition is a much better predictor of health:** we fully support the use of waist measurements as a tool to track progress (and one which takes the emphasis off the scales as the only focus), but we still feel that body fat is being overlooked by the new government initiative. There is a type of fat in our bodies called 'visceral fat' which is the most dangerous type of fat to have. This is the fat that typically sits around our middle (and our organs). Find out more here about why this fat is so dangerous to health. We focus our clients on losing body fat, rather than just seeing the number on the scales go down. We do this using a Tanita Body Fat monitor.

The Tanita scales can show clients who have been working hard on switching over to a healthier diet, and who are exercising more, that they may have lost body fat, although the scales has not yet moved. This is crucial to motivation levels, and is the reason why so many people give up on a weight loss plan. We explain to our clients that losing body fat is key, and the scales usually always catches up (so if body fat goes down, usually a week or two later the weight will also go down).

We also show our clients fat 'replicas' to encourage them (this illustrates the size of a pound or five pounds of fat to show them the substantial amount of space this takes up in our bodies and, therefore, the huge achievement in losing even this much of fat). This is what encourages people to continue losing weight and it is a key element of their success. It is one of the reasons explaining why studies show an incredible **82% weight maintenance rate after four years with our programme, compared with just 5% maximum after one year on conventional diets.**



Time to Educate the Public

We believe the public has a right to be educated about how carbohydrates work in our bodies and how processed carbohydrates and foods pumped with ingredients like fructose corn syrup (to bulk them up for cheaper) have played a major role in the overweight and obesity epidemic over the past two decades. In fact, the amount of sugar in our supermarket foods has increased to a shocking level over the past decade, and the public still seems unaware.

Sugar is a highly addictive substance. In fact, in a review published in the *British Medical Journal* last year, the authors argued that there are "substantial

parallels and overlap between [typical] drugs of abuse [like alcohol and drugs] and sugar, from the standpoint of brain neurochemistry as well as behaviour.” And the food manufacturers know it. The recent government initiative **does recommend** that sugar is limited, but does not expand that into educating the public about the fact that there are so many hidden sugars in our foods.

It’s now clear that the obesity epidemic is more likely explained by the surge in refined carbohydrates/sugars in our foods (some of which are ‘hidden’, leaving the consumer at an unfair advantage). Some food companies have actually invested heavily in various tactics to keep us hooked on certain foods, designing products that use sugar to bypass our natural appetite control mechanisms (meaning we often find it almost impossible to resist). No wonder that we’ve grown larger over the past few decades. Our food is simply loaded with sugar – that includes some yoghurts, breakfast cereals, snack bars, tinned soups and sweetened beverages. Of course, we have also become less active over the past few decades, but most experts believe it’s our sugar intake that has led to the overweight and obesity epidemic we are now facing.



The Psychology Behind Why We Overeat

The Healthy Ireland initiative does not, like many other initiatives, succeed in looking at the emotional and psychological reasons why we overeat, or choose to eat unhealthy foods. We will not achieve any progress with the obesity and overweight epidemic if we do not address this.

At Motivation, we know that the public have some awareness of the ‘correct’ foods to eat, and the importance of taking enough exercise. However, ‘knowing’ what to do is rarely enough. That is why we have dedicated ourselves to years of understanding the mechanics of long-term behavioural change. And it also explains why our one-to-one weight loss coaching is so successful – because it bridges that gap between knowledge and action.

One of the most effective strategies for bringing about behavioural change is known as motivational interviewing’ (or MI), a technique that our weight loss consultants have been trained in. This methodology assumes that responsibility and capability for change lies within the client themselves. The aim is to encourage the client to discuss any discrepancies, for instance, between what they *want* (their goals and dreams) and what they *do* in reality (for instance, they may keep self-sabotaging by drinking too much alcohol or letting go of any control over food at the weekend, although being overweight is making them desperately unhappy and they really want to be able to run around and kick a football with their children). The therapist’s task is to create a set of conditions that will reflect this conflict within them, and enhance the client’s own motivation for and commitment to change.



Supporting our Clients via Mental Weight

At Motivation, we have developed a unique concept called 'mental weight'. The report that is produced from conducting a mental weight questionnaire helps our clients to become aware of where they are going in relation to the habits, behaviours and emotional perspectives that underpin their daily choices. A client's mental weight is deduced by the client answering a set of approximately 25 questions on a monthly basis. Even those on the Maintenance Programme (a programme specifically designed for those who have reached an ideal weight and continue to attend our clinic on a monthly basis to ensure they remain at that new, healthier weight) complete the questionnaire in order to monitor and track changes in their behaviours and/or attitude.

Usually the changes are positive as the client progresses through their weight loss journey but, if things slip, it is a very useful tool to highlight caution areas and to readjust behaviour to help return to healthier habits and attitudes once more. We assist our clients in doing this, and we work with them on areas of their personality which only compound the weight problem – things such as perfectionism or 'all or nothing' thinking. We work hard to help them to reduce feelings of guilt and to retrain themselves to recover quickly from the inevitable slips that occur along the weight loss journey. We believe that these are the initiatives that will help bring about real and lasting change.

The answer does not lie in a single diet, or simply telling people to exercise more. Human behaviour is complex and, therefore, the answer must run deeper than a simple 'eat less, move more' approach.

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It's not just *what* you eat, it's *why*