



FEAR FOODS AND FOOD RULES

WHAT ARE FOOD RULES?

This chapter will all be about fear foods and food rules. And I encourage you to read the whole thing - even when you THINK you don't have any fear foods or food rules anymore. Food rules can be super sneaky and you might not even be aware of them. You will learn, why it is so important to identify your food rules and challenge them safely to find food freedom.



FEAR FOODS:

Fear foods are more obvious than food rules. And you probably know what fear foods are. They are foods you may feel uncomfortable, anxious or afraid eating. "Researchers have posited that increased learning of fear associations between food and the perceived negative outcome of weight gain"/disgust/loss of control results in avoidance of food. This can create isolation from social situations involving food, a lack of food enjoyment/variety, malnutrition and can increase anxiety over time.

FOOD RULES

"A food rule is when you allow external information (such as diet plans, tips, advice, etc) to be the sole or major determinant of your food choices or feelings about a specific food or category of food with disregard to your own body's signals, desires and feelings." They can be about specific eating patterns, food labels, portion sizes,...

- no eating past xx pm /before xx am
- I shall only have x amount of sth.
- ordering the healthier version
- xyz is "bad" or unhealthy
- I need to earn eating xyz
- I can have it, because I worked out
- x amount is too much
- volume eating
- how can I be already hungry again?
- I shall not eat more as him/her/they

**NOT EVERYTHING
THAT FEELS SAFE IS
SAFE AND NOT
EVERYTHING THAT
FEELS UNSAFE IS
UNSAFE.**

PSEUDO FOOD RULES

You may now think: okay, no, that's not me. I am eating all my previous fear foods. BUT already putting a morality on food "good" and "bad" is a food rule. Even then, when you actually eat it. Food rules can be sneaky in that way. And they can mess with the all-or nothing mentality, mindless eating, and how you're behaving around the act of eating

THEY ARE A PROBLEM BECAUSE...

Usually food rules and fear foods have the intention, to be "healthier". That is a good intention, BUT the execution doesn't add up:

INCREASED DESIRE

Can't have it? Want it! Studies have actually shown, that a restricted access to food is directly linked to the tendency to eat larger amounts of that specific food. Causing not only food obsession, but also overeating, bingeing and feeling out of control around these foods.

HUNGER AND FULLNESS CUES

By still following food rules, you are still mistrusting your body. You are eating because of external circumstances instead of internal. But your body is the only thing in this world, that can know, when, what and how much of it your body needs to function best.

SABOTAGING YOUR RECOVERY

Holding onto food rules can sabotage your recovery journey. You are not really letting go of your eating disorder. You're just putting a band aid on it. This is what we mean with "quasi recovery". You can not recovery fully from your eating disorder when holding on to avoidance.

SOCIAL LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS

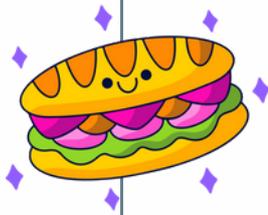
Going to a birthday party where no sugar-and-fat-free cakes are being served can be super stressful and un-enjoyable. And not only that - your mood will probably impact relationships negatively as well.

STRESS

Following food rules itself can already be stressful - especially because they tend to become more and more. And in addition to that some "healthy" food rules such as intermittent fasting may actually increase the amount of cortisol that is getting released. Causing sleep difficulties, gut issues, immune suppression,...

INCREASED ANXIETY

We avoid certain foods, to lower the anxiety, that comes along with eating these specific foods. But by avoiding and running away of your fears, your limiting your own life. And this avoidant-behaviour may start to show up with more and more foods in more and more life situations. Limiting you more and more - increasing your daily anxiety.



CHALLENGE YOUR FEAR FOODS AND FOOD RULES

write down your fear foods and food rules

add foods you are seem to avoid for other than eating disordered reasons as well (f.e." I don't like it")

divide the fear foods in three sections: super scary, medium scary and slightly scary

to start choose two foods/or rules from the slightly scary column

think about, what exactly you are afraid of. It is not the food itself, but which outcome you expect from eating it. Is this believe true? is it true for everyone or just you?

choose a relaxion exercise from the following pages

scary part: Challenge the chosen foods/rules

journal about, how the food tasted, rate your anxiety level, any thoughts that came up, ... or choose any other safe behaviour for after the challenge - if you need to

challenge these again, only by doing this your brain can rewire and the anxiety will decrease

challenge 1-2 rules/foods once a week until you ticked them all off

for the more scary and complex ones, check out the next page

EXPOSURE HIERARCHY

At first it may seem a good idea, to just right jump into the cold water. To start eating all these fear foods, deleting this stupid calorie counting app, etc. But what might happen is that you're ending up completely overwhelmed and anxious. This is exactly what we want to avoid, as we want to weaken the neuronal pathways that associate food with a negative outcome (anxiety). To do this you might actually want to easy yourself into it. F.e when your fear food is a store bought baked good:



So, what you want to do now, is to think about how you can gradually adjust a slightly challenging safe food into a medium or super scary fear food. Challenging your fear foods will never be super easy and comfortable and actually should be slightly out of your comfort zone. But this way it might be less overwhelming and won't set you back even further. There is no need to rush the process, taking small steps will still lead to your goal (full recovery).

Hint: your list of fear foods and food rules may now seem endless, but as you start challenging some of your fear foods, you may realise, that the other ones written down, aren't as challenging as they first were anymore - even when you haven't challenged that specific food item yet.

RELAXATION EXERCISES

Square breathing

inhale 1..2..3..4..
hold 1..2..3..4..
exhale 1..2..3..4..
hold 1..2..3..4..

As you begin to breathe in longer you immediately begin to relax the mind, improve the flow of oxygen to the brain, and spark more intuitive, clear, and productive thoughts. You can do it anywhere without someone noticing. It is a great way to decide to come out of your downwards spiralling thoughts back to reality.

body scan

You can begin the practice by lying on the floor, or a mat, or your bed. Basically, you can begin by focusing your attention at the top of your head and then move down the body, or vice versa. It's good to start with a guided practice (YouTube) to get a sense of how to move your attention up or down the body.

the aim is to be aware of the different regions of your body, and allow yourself to experience how each part feels, without trying to change anything. Just being with what is there.

gratitude walk

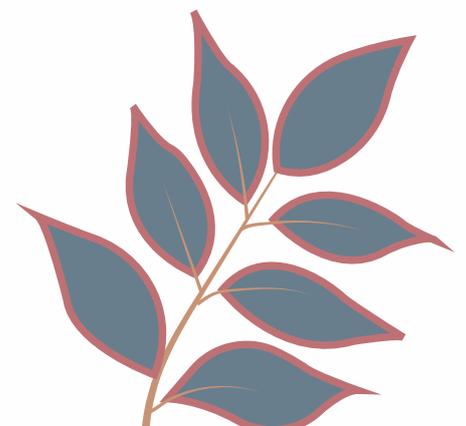
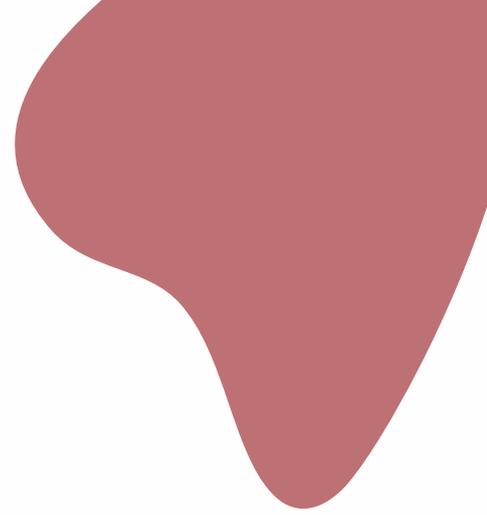
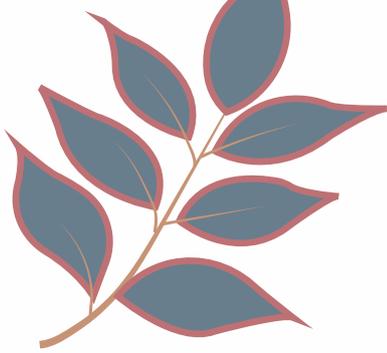
The goal of this walk is to open your mind for the small miracles in life again. Researches have shown that we can train our brain to be more grateful again. And this is how you do it:

- 1 Take some time 10 minutes might be enough. It's not about the walking, it's about the focus
- 2 no music, no phone, etc.
- 3 instead of staying in your head, shift your focus on what you see. Like the sun, trees, grass, flowers, how old nature is, vegetation, ...
- 4 when your thoughts drift away, come back to your surrounding

4-3-2-1 method

- 4 things you can see
- 3 things you can feel
- 2 things you can hear
- 1 thing you can smell

and then repeat this cycle 4-10 times. It is okay to name the same things over and over again. Eventually the things will change but try to name these things as intuitively as possible. You can say it out loud or when you are in public, just do it in your head to calm down your nervous system.



JOURNAL PROMPTS FOR AFTER THE CHALLENGE

HOW AM I FEELING? WHAT ARE MY THOUGHTS?

How did the food taste? What did you like/didn't like? How mindful did you eat?

IS THERE ANYTHING I AM AFRAID OF? ARE THESE FEARS RATIONAL? WHY NOT?

WHAT COULD I DO NOW, TO FEEL SAFE/BETTER?

What do I need? How can I make sure I am being safe? Why should I not skip the next meal?