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Partnership In Wellness

Weight Loss That Lasts: A Group Program Offering New Hope for An Old Problem

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Introduction:

Obesity is a modern epidemic that cuts across class, culture, race and gender.¹ The “weight battle” is so prevalent that many therapists have clients struggling with weight issues and body image but feel ill-equipped to help. International statistics reveal that the most advanced technological societies have the largest obesity problems.² In addition, it has been reported that up to 95% of all people who lose weight gain it back within two years.³ In 2005, Kaiser Permanente conducted a study comparing three approaches for weight loss maintenance.⁴ Compared to groups employing Chi Gong and Cognitive Support methods, the group utilizing the Tapas Acupressure Technique® (TAT®) was the most successful. As a result NIH awarded Kaiser Permanente \$2.1 million to further study the efficacy of TAT with weight loss maintenance. Results of this study are expected to be reported in February 2011.

The Tapas Acupressure Technique & Group Process

Tapas Acupressure Technique is a self-administered mind/body approach that reduces and clears stress. It is a combination of using specific fingers to lightly touch a few acupressure points around

the eyes and the back of the head while placing one’s attention on different aspects of a problem. This problem could be physical in nature like “I crave sweets right now” and / or psychological like “I feel really upset about craving sweets right now”. The result of completing the TAT process is an experience of non-attachment to the problem, including a sense of freedom and inner peace.

Based on our combined 45 years of experience in utilizing mind/body modalities with weight loss issues, trauma and stress management, our certification as TAT Professionals, and the results of the Kaiser Pilot study we developed a twelve-session group program called **Weight Loss That Lasts**. Our intention is to help clients replace failure with long-term success by:

- Uncovering and reducing the negative impact of core issues connected to overeating, bingeing and being overweight.
- Eliminating limiting beliefs related to weight issues.
- Reducing cravings and binge eating.
- Transforming anger, shame, hurt and other emotions related to being overweight.
- Developing the ability to make liberating choices and experiencing the peace that TAT can bring to the struggle of achieving lasting weight loss.

At the heart of this program is the Tapas Acupressure Technique, which addresses all aspects of stress and weight related challenges participants bring to the group including: anxiety, depression, yo-yo dieting, binge eating and previous trauma. We also process emotions such as shame and grief connected to limiting beliefs, poor body image and relationship problems.

Each two-hour session is based on specific themes such as: trauma, understanding and working with parts of self, negative beliefs / patterns / behaviors, addictions and cravings, allergies and medical issues, genetic and inherited patterns, the meaning of each step in the nine-step TAT process, developing resources, and anything else that gets in the way of reaching / maintaining ideal weight. A four-hour session is held where we eat a meal together and the participants learn how to guide one another in the TAT process. Homework offers opportunities to practice TAT at least once between group sessions with a phone "buddy", which enhances member skill development and promotes group cohesion. This is a skills based group where psychodynamic "processing", long check-ins and discussions are discouraged, including discussions about food and diets. Each week we focus on specific problems the participants bring in related to the theme and complete a TAT group process on these problems.

Results:

Since the spring of 2008, four different groups were conducted with twenty-two of thirty-three participants completing an eighteen question pre and post-group questionnaire. After twelve weeks 17 out of 22 participants responded **"not at all or a little bit"** to **"eating a lot of food in a short amount of time"** and **"eating large amounts of food when not hungry"**. Sixteen participants reported that they completely stopped binge eating. In addition, **"eating to soothe my feelings"** was reduced by 50%.

Examples of comments taken from participants' evaluations are:

" Sugar doesn't talk to me anymore. I stopped binge eating through using TAT directly on the habit of binge eating and on emotions such as abandonment related to bingeing."
– FK (lost & has kept off 34 lbs)

" This has been a terrible week with my husband's health and our relationship but I'm completely in control about food. I'm sticking to my eating plan and losing weight." – LV

" I always regarded eating as a symptom rather than the problem, so my much improved eating reflects overall stress management. Everyone has noted that I look more rested and relaxed and I certainly feel it. ... My blood pressure, which was medication resistant, has dropped from 155 over 110 to about 125 over 85 in two months. ... I liked the sense of community although our experience and difficulties were very different." – EV

" I've lost 20 lbs and my blood sugar was in 'normal range' ... I feel much more confident about continuing to lose weight until I reach a healthy body mass index. I'm able to feel safe when exercising and have much better self-esteem and body image." – AP

" As I worked my way through various life traumas I discovered a yearning to write that was at my core. As one trauma after another cleared up I felt free to do more writing. I even dare to call myself a writer again. Something has settled in me. It feels I'm living my true purpose."
– LC (lost and has kept off 25 lbs)

Findings & Discussion

Every participant, desperate for long term success, entered the group with chronic weight loss challenges. Though not every group member lost weight during the twelve sessions, our findings suggest that participants began to address underlying core issues. For example, a participant, disappointed that she did not lose weight, realized that she was not addressing the stresses around her husband's illness and as a result of the group process began to do so. By the groups' completion most participants reported reduced cravings and binge eating, diminished shame and anger, an increased ability to identify and resist triggers, improved coping skills, reduced negative impact of past trauma history and a renewed sense of purpose and hope for the future. During a reunion group, many participants reported that they continued to lose weight. Those who practiced TAT daily experienced the best results. Those who did TAT with a "Buddy" in between sessions reported feeling more connected to the group and experienced better results. Several members who continue to meet monthly with weekly "Buddy TAT Sessions" experience a high degree of success in clearing life stress and continued weight loss and maintenance. This is consistent with a study reported by Svetkey (2008) where those who had ongoing monthly personal contact had the least weight gain after 30 months. ⁵

As we write this article we are aware of the most recent findings that by 2020 three out of four Americans will be obese.⁶ Our hope is that this type of Weight Loss That Lasts Program can help a significant number of people avoid this prediction.

Citations:

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