

# **Women, Weight, and ADHD**

**Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D., CPC**

Licensed Psychologist

Weight Loss Coach and Executive Coach

430 Exton Commons

Exton, PA 19341

610 280 7282

drjeff4help@aol.com

**<http://www.drjeffonline.com>**

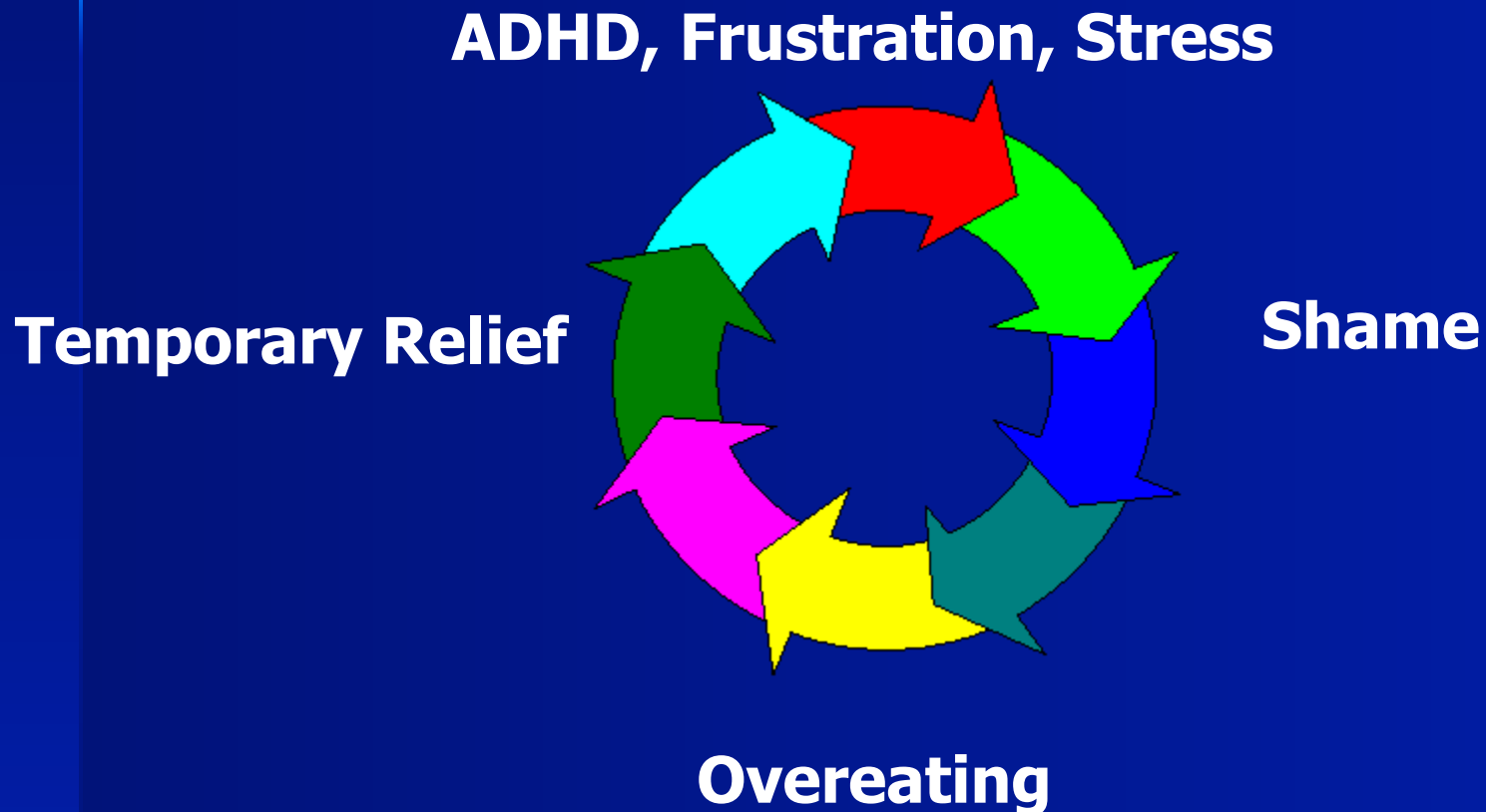
# Professional Experience

- Certified Professional Coach/Weight Loss Coach
  - individual
  - group coaching
- 22 years as a counseling psychologist working with all ages.
- Consulting psychologist to outpatient intensive weight loss programs Albany and Philadelphia
- Professional Advisory Board Regional YMCA
- PA Psychology Continuing Ed. Board Member
- Personally manage ADHD and compulsive eating
- Presenter of seminars on compulsive eating

# Neurochemistry of Overeating



# Women, ADHD, and Shame—A Weighty Cycle





# ADHD and Disordered Eating

The ADHD/emotional/disordered eating connection makes sense.

Consistent, healthy eating requires organization and planning. These two areas of cognitive functioning are typically difficult for those with ADHD.

## **ADHD + Eating = “All or Nothing”**

Fasting and binging is another common ADHD pattern: all or nothing, impulsive, disorganized approach to food. Many people mistakenly believe that it's good to skip a meal, not realizing that they are setting themselves up to overeat at the next meal and beyond.

# ADHD Blurs Satiety Cues

Individuals with ADHD may skip meals because they were busy and distracted.

Hunger later becomes so intense that they swing in the opposite direction, overeating well beyond the point of reasonable intake because they don't know when to stop until they feel "stuffed."

Eat for many reasons besides hunger - including boredom, self-stimulation, anger, sadness, reward, simple food availability, and stress relief.

# Mindless Instead of Mindful

- Many people with ADHD don't pay enough attention to their hunger levels. They may become busy during the day, eating very little, and then discover that they're ravenous - resorting to fast food or high-calorie snacks because it's too hard to wait and eating something healthy.
- Good eating habits require self-awareness - awareness of when one is hungry, awareness of when one is full.

# **Especially in ADHD Mind: Diets Get Boring/Don't Work**

- “Diet“ reflects flawed thinking.
- Many with ADHD want "instant results" and are drawn to the most strict and radical diet plan promising a weight loss of several pounds per week. Statistics show that such plans are doomed to failure for the general population, and are even less likely to result in long-term success for those with ADHD.

# Weight Management Strategies for Women with ADHD

# Manage Temptation

- Don't put temptation in your path and then expect to control your impulses (for example a bowl of candy on your desk.)
- Always keep healthy snacks around for times when hunger strikes.
- Don't require too much planning and organization of yourself - make sure there are healthy grab-and-go food items for times when the unexpected happens.

# ADHD and Slippery Slope of Fast Food

- Women with ADHD tend to not to plan.
- They think, “Finally, time for me!!!!”
- Grabbing food on the run, “I want it now”, matches up with our society, “Your instant wish is my command!”
- Compulsive eating patterns among those with ADHD- an intense craving for junk food, wheat and dairy products. (Dr. Michael Lyon, 2000)



# Replace to Set Pace

- More healthy alternatives: Protein bars, sunflower seeds, dried fruit, yogurt (which can last for weeks when refrigerated), unsalted nuts, and refrigerated fresh fruit - a bag of apples or oranges.
- Go nuts and think green to eat clean.

# Keep it Real

ADHD friendly food plan makes allowances for common ADHD patterns such as forgetfulness or lateness.

Often, bad eating patterns are related to our particular environment.

To make changes in your own eating patterns, you may need to make changes in the environment - both at home and at work.

Rehearse your polite but firm refusals.

# **Stimulants No Magic Fix**

Stimulant medication alone has not been shown to be effective in achieving and maintaining weight loss and improved daily eating patterns. Although appetite suppression is a common side effect of stimulant medication during the initial phase of treatment, this side effect can wear off.

# Indirect Benefits of Stimulants for Weight Management

- Stimulant medication enhances the executive functions of the brain. In other words, stimulants can help individuals with ADHD to become better self-observers.
- Can help self-regulate and resist eating impulses.
- More easily engage in the planning and follow-through necessary for the maintenance of healthy eating habits.
- But pills never replace skills.

# Why Most “diet plans” Don't Work For Those With ADHD

- Many diet plans are very ADD-unfriendly.
- They require detailed record-keeping, weighing of food, or unrealistically severe food restrictions are difficult for those without ADD (ADHD) and impossible for those with ADD (ADHD). Other weight loss programs involve pre-selected, pre-packaged foods that may work well in the short-run, but that do not help the individual with ADD (ADHD) to learn to make consistently good choices in real-world food environments.

# Dr. Bernstein's Weight Loss Coaching Model

## ■ L-O-S-E

- *Let* go of limiting beliefs.
- *Options* for accountability.
- *Set* sub-goals and goals.
- *Engage* in positive behaviors.

# Self-Limiting Beliefs ADHDers and Weight Loss

- Do not “Should” all over yourself
  - Replace “should” with “would like”.
- \_Replace “I always give in” with “I tend to struggle when\_\_\_\_\_”
- Replace “hate” with “dislike” and move toward “like”, if possible.

# Self-Limiting Beliefs ADHDers and Weight Loss

- Myth: “I need to wait to get motivated” (procrastination).
  - Remember motivation begins with action.
- Toxic self-limiting labels.
  - Lazy
  - Fat
  - Unable



# Weight Loss Options for Accountability

- Mourn the loss of fantasies
  - Perfect body time is now b/c you're alive.
  - Myth: You should encourage me more.
  - Fairy Dust: It does not count, if \_\_\_\_\_?
- Accountability through whatever works for you. Schedules, weigh food, OA, "Lose It" App. For others, Weight Watchers, Calorie Count.com

# Weight Loss Options for Accountability

- Food management is not restriction.
  - Ever still wanted much more when eating too much?
- Emotional eating is fantasy/trance and zaps accountability.
- 95 % of diets don't work b/c emotional eating.
- ADHDers likely less aware of emotional eating b/c of mind racing many places. Hard to see options.
- Accountability parallels managing weight and ADHD.

# Emotional Eating Up Close

- You are an emotional eater if you:
  - eat when you are not hungry.
  - often eat beyond fullness.
  - binge at night or when you are alone.
  - feel out of control or compulsive about food.
  - sneak eat.
  - use food for love, comfort, distraction, etc...
  - want to avoid feelings, escape, tune out with food.
  - find diets not worked for in the long run.

# Emotional Eating Up Close

- You may also tend to be:
  - a perfectionist and all or nothing.
    - in your approach to dieting.
  - high achiever.
  - hard on yourself.
  - sensitive and perceptive, affected by the moods of others. -
- Coaching will likely help you if you can relate to these points.

# Weight Loss Options for Keeping Accountability

- Self-Soothe with zero calorie, 100 percent fun.
  - Music
  - Prayer
  - Exercise
  - Walks
  - Books
  - Movies
  - Sports
  - Meditation

# Setting Goals is Powerful

- Create empowerment.
- Spark motivation.
- Highlight accountability.
- Support shifts in thinking.
- Change past to future orientation.
- Reduce useless patterns of spinning thoughts

# Setting Goals

- Set a goal weight range vs. a goal weight.
- Make sure goal is yours and realistic.
- See yourself maintaining even before arriving at weight range goal.
- Remember it is not easy.
- Prepare to claim the victory steps, learn from the set backs.
- Celebrate struggling through struggles.

# Engage With Awareness

- Awareness a must esp. for ADHDers
- Stay more committed to results vs. attached to them...very important!
- Stay tuned in to the “here and now.”
- Yes be prepared, but also keep getting prepared!
  - Life throws curve balls..



# Engage With Awareness

- Track Gratitudes: pencil and paper, electronically
- Easier to engage smart vs. hard.
- Honesty breeds accountability.
- Remind yourself of benefits.
- Balance long term thinking vs. short term.

# Dr. Jeff's Sample LOSE Coaching Questions

- ***L* et go**—What has been getting in your way when trying to lose weight?
- ***O* ptions**-What choices can you make to be more accountable ?
- ***S* et**-What Goals can you set for yourself?
- ***E* ngage**-What new behaviors can you commitment to engage to reach your goals?

# References

- Fleming, John (2002) Eating disorders in women with ADHD. In P.Quinn & K. Nadeau, *Gender Issues and ADHD*, pp. 411-426. Silver Spring: Advantage Books.
- Lyon, Michael (2000) *Healing the hyperactive brain*. Calgary, AB, Canada: Focused Publishing.

# Books by Jeffrey Bernstein, Ph.D.

- *Liking the Child You Love* (2009 Da Capo Lifelong Press)
- *10 Days to a Less Distracted Child* (2007 Da Capo Lifelong Press)
- *10 Days to a Less Defiant Child* (2006 Da Capo Lifelong Press)
- *Why Can't You Read My Mind?* (2003, Da Capo Lifelong Press)