Use of ACT for weight management problems

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Overview

- Evidence-based for Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and weight management

- Use of ACT for the weight management
  - ACT case conceptualisation
  - Group work

- Two experiential exercises
Evidence base for ACT

- **Increasing empirical support for ACT**
  - 73 Randomised Control Trials (RCT) to date (May 2013)
  - Recommended clinical populations in US: Chronic pain (strong support), depression, anxiety disorders, psychosis, and substance misuse. (APA Div 12 SCP, 2012; SAMHSA, 2012)

- **Over 10% of RCTs are weight-related**
  - 8 RCT relating to weight management, problematic eating, emotional eating, and increased activity (6 with overweight population)
  - 3 studies compared ACT & CBT - ACT significantly better outcomes than CBT
Weight Management group for Diabetes patients

- Community service – Number of people with co-morbid Type 2 diabetes and weight issues
- 12 weekly 2hr sessions (max. 12 people)
- Using ACT consistent approach
Evidence-based Dietary Principals Underpinning the Group

- **Energy Balance**
  - Energy in (Food) < Energy out (activity) = weight loss

- A balanced diet
  - e.g. The eatwell plate

- Emphasis on gradual long-term behavioural changes
  - Apposed to fad diets
  - Fit For Life campaign

- Dietician available every 3rd week post session
ACT Case Conceptualisation

Fusion with the past or future
past evaluations and future predictions

Experiential Avoidance -
unwanted thoughts, feelings and
physical sensations

Cognitive Fusion – reason
giving, instructions, judgements

Psychological Inflexibility

Remoteness from Values – lack of
contact with what’s truly important to
people

Unworkable Action – behaviour
that contribute to keeping people
stuck

Fusion with Conceptualised Self

“I am…” statements
ACT Case Conceptualisation

Fusion with the past or future
past evaluations and future predictions
“I’ve tried it all before (weight watchers, slimming world etc)”,
“I’ve not succeeded in the past, so why will this attempt be any
different?”, “This won’t work” (hopelessness & scepticism)

Experiential Avoidance
Boredom, Anxiety / Stress, Sadness,
Low Mood, Shame, Guilt,
Embarrassment, Frustration /
Anger / Disappointment, Loneliness,
Hunger, Urges and Cravings,
Closeness / Vulnerability

Cognitive Fusion – reason
giving, instructions, judgements
“I’m hungry”, “What’s in the cupboard?”,
“I’ll just have one (more)”, “While I’m here…”

“I shouldn’t have that, but it looks so tasty”
“This is too hard, I can’t resist”

“I can’t leave food on the plate”

“Oh, sod it, I’ll start again tomorrow”, “I can’t be bothered”, “What’s the point?”

Psychological Inflexibility

Remoteness from Values
Overvaluing Weight Loss
Putting off family, friends, leisure, work
activities until they have lost weight (life being on hold)

Unworkable Action
Binge / Comfort Eating -
Overeating or snacking
Distract yourself – keeping busy, sleeping,
Giving in to urges
Choosing inactivity over activity
TV, home vs walking, swimming
Avoiding situations – family and friends, family
events, anywhere with food (supermarket etc),
going to local shops, restaurant etc to eat

“I am a fat and ugly”
“I am a failure” “I am useless”
“I’m not good enough”
ACT interventions

Acceptance and Mindfulness Processes
- Acceptance
- Cognitive Defusion

Psychological Flexibility
- Being Present
- Self as Context

Commitment and Behavioural Activation Processes
- Defining Valued Directions
- Committed Action
ACT intervention as skills training

**MINDFULNESS**
- Present moment awareness training
- Noticing and untangling from internal barriers to values-based action
- Strengthen your resilient self

**VALUES-BASED LIVING**
- Defining your values
- Mindfully engaging in values-based actions
- Using values as a guide to goals and daily behaviour

(Flaxman et al, 2013)
Developing Mindfulness Skills

- Mindfulness exercises introduced from the start
- Used in Each session

Example Exercises:
- Introduction: awareness vs auto-pilot
- Mindfulness of the body
- Mindfulness of the breath
- Food diary (also committed action)
- Mindfulness of the hand (Undermining predictions)
- Mindfulness of a raisin (Promote mindful eating)
- Hunger and fullness scale
- Urge surfing
Mindfulness exercise

- Brief body scan
- Incorporate a hunger and fullness scale
  - “How hungry am I?”

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<thead>
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<th>HUNGER AND FULLNESS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ravenous</td>
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- Used in combination with Food diaries
Working with Values

- Positioning values
  - Assume health is important or not?
- Behaviour change is difficult
  - So why would people persist in making changes?
- Values are freely-chosen (e.g. relationships, health, leisure, work/education)
- Promoting mindful eating and increased committed action

- Exercises: weekly committed action, Values card sort, Passengers on the Bus, 80th Birthday Exercise
Body Image Exercise

- Addresses All ACT processes
- ACT-consistent exposure to unwanted thoughts and feelings
- Impact on Value Domains (E.g. Swimming)
- Invitation for people to be willing to participate in something potentially uncomfortable
Part 1: Visualisation

- Focus on you and your body for next few moments

- Write down all the worst thoughts that your mind says about you and your body
  - Thoughts with meaning, that are emotionally charged in some way
  - E.g. “I am…” statements, self-critical judgements, predictions, mind-reading

- Bring to mind any particularly uncomfortable situations for you:
  - E.g. being in front of a mirror,
  - Being with others – e.g. swimming pool, meeting new people, intimate relationships

- Expand to any difficult situation and any thoughts you have that you struggle with about yourself

- Now identify and circle the most difficult, painful judgement about yourself
  - Pause: Focus on what comes up for you
Part 2: What’s Important?

Walk around room looking at value domains:

- Parenting
- Family relationships
- Friendship & social relationships
- Intimate relationship
- Sex & sexual relationships
- Leisure activities & hobbies
- Health & physical well-being
- Personal growth & development
- Education & training
- Spirituality and/or religion
- Community & Environment
- Career & occupations

To Think about…

- What’s truly important to you in your life?
- Where do these thoughts and feelings get in the way of what’s important to you?
- Can you make room for them and still do what’s important to you?
Body Image Exercise

Debrief

• What was that exercise like for people?
Are there any Questions?

Contact: mattwardley@gmail.com

References

- End Emotional Eating, Jennifer Taitz
- ACT Made Simple, Russ Harris