

UIC Solutions Suite Webinar Series

Transcript for how-to webinar on Nutrition and Exercise for Wellness and Recovery (NEW-R)

Recorded by Dr. Judith A. Cook

Slide 1:

Thank you for visiting the University of Illinois at Chicago's Health & Recovery Solutions Suite. The following recording comes to you from the UIC Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Visit our online Solutions Suite to obtain free tools that promote health, self-direction, and employment for the behavioral health field.

Slide 2:

Hello. My name is Judith Cook. I direct the University of Illinois at Chicago's Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Our Center offers an online Solutions Suite, containing free tools for the behavioral health field. These tools promote wellness, self-direction, and employment for people who are recovering from mental illnesses. You can visit our Solutions Suite on the web site where you found this webinar, at www.center4healthandsdc.org. Today, I'll be discussing how to implement one of the tools found in our Solutions Suite, called *Nutrition and Exercise for Wellness and Recovery*, or NEW-R.

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NEW-R and the Solutions Suite are jointly funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Community Living; and by the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The grant number is 90RT5038. Contents do not represent the policy of any agency or endorsement by the federal government.

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There are several learning objectives for this webinar. You'll learn about the purpose and format of NEW-R. You'll also learn about the qualifications needed by instructors, as well as what training and preparation is required. I'll also describe marketing strategies for encouraging people to sign up for NEW-R. And, I'll review the underlying principles and the content of each session. Finally, I'll discuss the environments in which participants live and receive services, and how these environments can help or hinder successful use of NEW-R in people's lives.

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NEW-R is a popular 8-week weight loss program developed by Dr. Catana Brown of Midwestern University with her colleagues Jeannine Goetz and Cherie Bledsoe. It is based on a successful 6-month weight loss program developed earlier by Dr. Brown, and is designed to meet the special needs of people in mental health recovery. NEW-R helps people learn about healthy eating and safe physical activity. Participants also learn new skills to apply this health information in their daily lives, based on their personal strengths, needs, likes, and dislikes.

The concept of intentionality is promoted throughout the NEW-R curriculum. Intentionality means realizing that life is made up of choices. We can choose to drift through life, or we can choose to take actions each day that will make us feel better and more fulfilled. Intentionality involves stepping back to assess how your personality and environment interact to affect your choices. Then, you make concrete plans and set goals to achieve what you want within the context of your life.

NEW-R is designed to promote weight loss. Although we recognize that not everyone is ready to commit to losing weight, learning about healthy eating and exercise can build a foundation giving people the tools they need when they are ready.

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You probably know many reasons why weight management is important because there's a lot of information and research available on this topic. I won't provide detailed information here about the effects of being overweight, but I do want to point out that maintaining a healthy weight is critical for overall physical and mental health. Being overweight, and especially being very overweight or obese, is associated with many diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer. The more excess weight people carry, the more likely they are to develop physical impairments and even die prematurely. To learn more, you can find studies about this on our web site, at the address I mentioned earlier.

Research has shown that people in mental health recovery are far more likely to be overweight than others in our country. This also means that they're more likely to have weight-related medical conditions, like the ones I just mentioned. Some studies have shown that people in recovery are dying decades earlier than others, largely because of these weight-related conditions.

There is hope, however. Even a small amount of weight loss can help improve people's health and longevity. We know from research that, with support, people in recovery can and do lose weight. However, we also know that standard weight management programs, like Weight Watchers® or Jenny Craig®, are not geared to the special needs of people in recovery. For example, they may require the purchase of prepared foods that many people in recovery can't afford. This is why we developed our own program.

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Why is NEW-R so popular? For one thing, it's easy to offer in different kinds of settings, such as community mental health programs, outpatient clinics, psychiatric rehabilitation programs, and peer-run centers. Also, the content and approaches in NEW-R were informed by knowledge we obtained from national wellness experts, including people in recovery. NEW-R is also informed by research, and our research suggests that it works. Our pilot study of NEW-R found that people lost up to 10 pounds after participating in 8-weeks of NEW-R sessions.

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NEW-R is based on principles of psychiatric rehabilitation. Psychiatric rehabilitation is a therapeutic approach that focuses on restoring community functioning and well-being of people diagnosed with a mental or emotional disorder. NEW-R incorporates five psychiatric rehabilitation strategies. First, it offers both instrumental and social support to participants. Instrumental supports help people apply the new knowledge they get from NEW-R. Applying this knowledge involves using tangible resources, such as recipes, food portion guides, pedometers, and exercise videos. Social support is provided through the group format, as people work together to overcome the challenges they face in building a healthier lifestyle.

A second psychiatric rehabilitation strategy is goal-setting, which allows participants to decide how to fit what they're learning into their own lives and situations. A third strategy is skills training. NEW-R instruction simplifies the skills that need to be mastered. It does this by providing role models for healthy living, and allowing for practice at each session and in-between sessions. It also reinforces success, while providing support when people encounter setbacks. Using these strategies helps participants become confident that they can make changes, and increases their motivation to continue with NEW-R.

A fourth psychiatric rehabilitation strategy is transfer training, which helps participants move what they are learning from the classroom to their lives. NEW-R helps people apply what they learn by providing participants with meal planners, charts to record healthy choices, and homework in which they work on weekly goals.

Finally, NEW-R uses cognitive compensation, to help learners with special needs master each session's content. This is done by focusing on only a few learning goals each week, and repeating certain lessons every week. Repetition includes weekly commitment to intentionality, testimonials, and monitoring of goals. NEW-R also uses different instructional methods, including lectures, active learning, and peer mentoring.

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As you consider whether to offer NEW-R, you may be wondering if it's suitable for the people you work with, that is, your clients, patients, or peers. You should know that NEW-R is designed to be safe for most people, with a few notes of caution. First, as people sample new foods and plan new meals, be sure to remind them to avoid foods that they shouldn't eat because of their medications or medical conditions. For example, people who take certain medicines to lower cholesterol need to avoid eating grapefruit. Also, we strongly recommend that some people get their doctor's approval before participating in NEW-R. This includes people with heart conditions, those who've experienced eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia, and pregnant women. Many people in recovery have physical ailments, such as problems with their backs or knees, but they still can participate in NEW-R's weekly exercise component by staying seated.

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Given the importance of weight loss for people in recovery, we designed NEW-R to be taught by instructors without intensive training or certification. However, we do have a number of recommendations for people who are preparing to offer the intervention. First, instructors should watch this webinar on how to teach it, and they should read and become very familiar with the leader and participant manuals. We recommend that classes be co-taught by two instructors, with a third for back-up, in case one of the primary teachers is unavailable. Holding practice sessions with each other and involving other co-workers or peers as an audience is also strongly suggested. Instructors should visit the government website called ChooseMyPlate to learn more about nutrition, healthy eating, and goal-setting. It's a good idea for one or both instructors to have experience running health education groups. Finally, we strongly suggest that at least one of the two instructors be a person in mental health recovery. It's not necessary for instructors to be of normal weight or very physically fit to lead NEW-R. We believe that a good role model is someone who is actively engaged in learning to eat healthier and to exercise, just like the group members.

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It's helpful for instructors to be aware of NEW-R's foundational principles. Understanding these principles leads to more effective teaching. As I discussed earlier, NEW-R is based on being intentional. This is done by helping participants make daily plans for healthy eating and exercise. Additionally, part of intentionality is striving to engage in meaningful or purposeful activities each day. Later, I'll review exactly how this is done but, for now, remember that the more purpose we have in life, the more likely we are to be motivated to change or improve our health habits.

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While we don't want to over-emphasize weight loss to NEW-R participants, the fact is that changing how much one eats has the biggest impact on weight management. Safely restricting calories is necessary for people to lose excess weight. In NEW-R, we believe that intentionally being aware of what we're eating is a great way to change our food intake, both in terms of eating less and choosing healthier options.

NEW-R asks participants to commit to exercising because it has many health benefits. Since we recognize that boredom and being too sedentary can lead to overeating, we stress the importance of exercising and also having meaningful activities.

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The more we believe in ourselves, the more likely we are to achieve our goals. For this reason, NEW-R instructors work to create a hopeful atmosphere in group sessions, so people can begin to believe in their ability to lead a healthier lifestyle. This hopefulness is based on knowing that even a small amount of weight loss can have a big impact on health and well-being. NEW-R instructors also work to dispel the many myths and misconceptions that people have about dieting. Often, people say that they can't afford to eat healthy, they can't find time to exercise, that vegetables and fruit just don't taste good, and that they don't want to give up their comfort foods because their lives are stressful and difficult. Throughout the curriculum, NEW-R helps both instructors and participants overcome and move beyond these ways of thinking.

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NEW-R instructors are encouraged to understand that food has meaning in people's lives beyond sustenance. In all societies, food plays an important part in conveying cultural or religious beliefs, creating a sense of community, and supporting people when in need. Therefore, it's important for both instructors and participants to think about the cultural role of food as they seek to change their health habits. This means considering one's own community, and the role of food in its celebrations, holidays, worship, and hard times. It's also critical to be aware of personal experience and the generational impact of restricted access to food. For example, African Americans, Native Americans, and other diverse groups in the U.S. have not always had control over where or how they could shop or have a meal.

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NEW-R classes meet 90 minutes each week for two months. We believe that the group format is very important for the social and peer support it provides. It also offers motivation that comes from being accountable to supportive others about our eating and exercise choices. However, NEW-R has been offered in 1-on-1 sessions, which might work best in some settings, due to service billing requirements or other logistical demands. However, we feel that some of the critical ingredients of NEW-R are lost when it is delivered as an individual service.

We also recommend that NEW-R be offered only once a week. This allows enough time for participants to work on their goals and alter their habits. Sessions also are best taught in community settings where participants have control over their meal planning, can exercise regularly, and be physically active. We've designed NEW-R to be used by people at lower reading levels, and for people who don't know much about nutrition and safe physical activity.

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Working with occupational therapy students and people in recovery, NEW-R author Catana Brown created 8 exercise videos to accompany the group sessions. Each video is 20 to 25 minutes in length, and can be used during class as well as in-between sessions. The videos are offered in order, with exercises progressing from least to most strenuous, including stretching, yoga, dancing, kick boxing, and a core workout. The exercises are demonstrated by people who stand and others who sit, to encourage people at varying levels of physical fitness to participate safely. The videos stream from our web site but, if you prefer, you can also contact our Center to request DVDs to play from a laptop. We made sure that NEW-R also provides many suggestions for other forms of exercise, if the videos aren't feasible or appealing. Remember, while exercising and physical activity are very important for participants' health, nobody should be pushed beyond what is safe or comfortable for them.

The NEW-R class format also reflects the growing evidence for the role of feedback as a motivator for creating new habits. One feedback mechanism that is especially effective is private weigh-ins at the beginning of each session. Participants should be told before joining NEW-R that there will be weekly weigh-ins to help them become more self-aware, remain motivated, and monitor progress. It's common

for someone who is overweight to be surprised by how much he or she weighs. This awareness can then have a powerful impact on the desire to lose weight. At the same time, it's important that weigh-ins be handled sensitively, with support for whatever the scale reveals. Instructors must ensure that nobody feels judged or shamed by how much they weigh, so that the feedback will stimulate positive action rather than shame or hopelessness. Other types of effective feedback include recording one's calories each day, and using a device for reminders of when it's time to exercise like a Fitbit or iPhone app.

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Let's look now at how the foundational principles of NEW-R make up its framework for success, with five key commitments.

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The first commitment is being intentional. To translate this principle into action, NEW-R participants are helped to plan what they will do each day, especially regarding meals, snacks, and exercise. This plan is discussed and adjusted at every session. Putting intentionality into practice also means that participants both give and receive peer support to create a mindset for health and lifestyle changes. Finally, participants are told that being intentional involves committing to attend every class for the entire two months. Showing up is half the battle and, even if people don't lose weight in the first two months, there's a good chance they will eventually lose weight if they commit to learning how to change their lifestyle.

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The second commitment is to setting goals for improved eating and exercise. NEW-R works partly because people are taught to set goals they can actually reach. Knowing you have a goal you can reach, given both your strengths and your limitations, is one of the most powerful ingredients of successful weight management. By proclaiming a goal, people aren't leaving their good intentions to chance. For some participants, one combined weekly goal for healthier eating and exercise will work. Others will find it better to set one reachable goal for eating and a separate reachable goal for exercising. Every week, participants discuss how they fared in reaching their goals, and set new goals or tweak existing ones. If it seems helpful and they have the time, instructors can meet with participants between classes, to review and revise goals, and provide personalized support for goal attainment. Magic will start to happen as people reach their smaller goals, their confidence grows, and they begin to believe that they really can eat healthier and be more physically active.

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The third commitment is to both giving and receiving support. First of all, the group involves meeting with people who also want to learn about healthier choices, which is a form of social support in and of itself. Instructors can promote even more social support by helping participants form a friendship with someone in the class who has similar viewpoints or goals. Instructors and participants can offer one another support between classes as well, through regular emails, text messages, phone calls, or meetings. If the program can arrange for it, instructors also can make use of peer coaches inside and outside of class to help people master new content and skills.

We recommend that control of class discussions be transferred from instructors to participants over time. The more ownership people assume for their own weight management process, and the more confidence they build, the more likely they are to continue applying their new knowledge and skills.

Maintaining regular exercise can be very challenging for participants. We've found that arranging for peer coaches, students, or volunteers to facilitate exercise sessions between NEW-R classes helps keep people on-track with their exercise goals.

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The fourth commitment is to developing a structured daily life. It's one thing to say that we'll find purposeful things to do each day, and another thing to actually get out and do them. This is why we strongly recommend that participants create a *written* plan for their day, as a way to add positive structure. It can be awkward to do this at first, but over time, people begin to see the value of having reasons to get out of bed and work on their well-being. Having a written plan for one's day is a clear way to put intentionality into practice. One is not just committing to being more intentional, but also specifying exactly *how* and *when*. Also, knowing when to stop and eat a healthy meal or take a long walk builds healthier habits right into one's daily routine.

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Here are some sample statements for a daily plan. An Intentionality Plan often includes what time to wake up, which meaningful activities to do, how to spend time moving one's body, which healthy foods to eat, how and when to offer support to others, and where and when to seek support. An important part of intentionality is self-forgiveness when goals aren't met or unhealthy habits are resumed, as they often will be.

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The final commitment people are asked to make is to maintain progress after the class ends. This starts with a celebration ceremony at the final session. The ceremony is a time to emphasize that this is not the end, but the beginning of healthier habits and choices. During the final session, participants are also encouraged to create a maintenance plan, similar to their intentionality plan. This maintenance plan includes ongoing goal-setting for healthier eating and exercise. It's also helpful to talk with participants about how they might stay in touch with each other to continue receiving support.

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Once aware of the principles, content, and flow of New-R, instructors should be ready to get started. Preparation starts each week by re-reading the session notes 2 to 3 days before class, no matter how many times you've taught it. This is also the time to decide which instructor will cover which points of the curriculum. Instructors also should gather the needed supplies, including different fruits and vegetables for participants to sample. When doing this, they should keep in mind that texture is a primary reason that people reject new foods. Instructors can poll the group for preferred textures, such as crunchy or chewy, and try to supply foods with these textures. Additionally, it's well-known that many people who receive public mental health services have poor dental health, so they may find eating hard fruits and vegetables to be painful. Sampling softer choices is often better for those who cannot manage harder whole foods.

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When it comes to the exercise segment of each class, instructors should be prepared for participants' reluctance. Many people won't have exercised in a long time. Others will think they have to be fit or have attractive workout clothes to participate. Some may resist exercising in front of other people. These are all legitimate concerns. We've found that it's essential to plan ways of exercising that are fun, in addition to using the videos. For example, during the first session, instructors can poll the group for their favorite dance songs. These can then be downloaded and played during the next class to get people moving. Also, we've found that even people who refuse all forms of exercise are willing to throw a ball or a Frisbee, which helps them loosen up and remember that exercising can be enjoyable.

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Instructors will need to market NEW-R, in order to encourage people to sign up. Instructors, and the programs they work for, should be prepared to face some initial hesitation when they approach people about joining NEW-R. This comes in different forms. The first is lack of interest in joining another group where they discuss their mental health needs. To address this barrier, you should emphasize that this is

not a mental health group. Instead, it's a weight management program, like any other they might join in the community. But unlike other programs, NEW-R isn't totally focused on weight loss. Instead, it's is a fun and personalized way to learn about healthy eating and exercise. Finally, there are no judgments or body shaming in NEW-R.

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In your marketing efforts, it's also helpful to explain that NEW-R is designed especially for people in mental health recovery, and builds on their special strengths. Peer support, hope, and encouragement are offered in abundance. You'll want to clarify that people don't have to give up their comfort foods or favorite dishes. Instead, they'll learn how to eat the foods they love in moderation through measured portions.

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Earlier, I mentioned that people are asked to show their intentionality by committing to attend every class. That said, lack of reliable transportation will be a barrier for many people. It's helpful if the program or agency can assist with transportation. This can be done by offering the classes at a time when most people are able to catch a ride with family or friends, or by providing vans that take people to and from their homes, or stipends to help people pay for public transportation or a taxi.

NEW-R works because it is highly individualized. We recognize that participants will differ in the types of changes they can and want to make, and in the weight management they can achieve. People are more likely to have positive outcomes if they're helped to make choices that best match their needs, preferences, and lifestyles. You may be aware of the Stages of Change model, which suggests that people move along a continuum as they prepare to change their behavior. This means that some NEW-R participants will be ready to take action right away, while others will only be ready to think about making changes but not yet ready to act. Everyone will benefit from hearing testimonials, seeing others enjoy new health habits, and learning about nutrition and exercise, even if they're not yet ready to make changes. No matter how ready a person may be, losing weight is challenging for most people. For this reason, we recommend focusing on what people can do, rather than on what they can't do or on areas where someone else thinks they to improve.

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One of the best ways to engage people in NEW-R is to make it fun and interesting. Ask people questions about what they think or believe. Encourage group discussion and get people involved in the activities. Don't be afraid to laugh and enjoy the time spent together. If you can, giving people resources, such as pedometers, pocket-sized calorie counting books, or healthy snacks, can increase their enjoyment as well. Be sure to keep extra participant binders on-hand for when people lose theirs or forget to bring it to class.

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When teaching NEW-R, you'll notice that there are common elements in every session. Each week starts with an inspirational quote to create a positive mindset. Each class includes didactic instruction, followed by active learning, where people apply what they've heard to their own lives. Goals are discussed and set each week. Participants exercise together during every session, and each class ends with a success story.

Whenever possible, we recommend that the people in the group work together to prepare and share a meal right after class. This is one of the best ways to provide different examples of delicious, healthy meals. Also, while eating that meal, participants enjoy brainstorming what meal they'll prepare after next week's session. This is a good time for them to consider other cuisines than the ones they're used to or grew up with.

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It's time to take a brief tour of the content of each NEW-R class. If you can, it helps to have copies of the leader and participant manuals in front of you now, so you can refer to them as I walk through each of the sessions. You can download them by visiting the NEW-R web site page where you found this webinar. Hit the pause button if you need to, and take the time to print out the manuals.

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Session 1 is called, "I Can Make a Change." Participants learn about the format and components of NEW-R. They're given information about the effects of over-eating and obesity on physical and mental health. Then, they learn the encouraging news that even small changes in weight can have a positive impact on their overall health. Session 1 also presents the concept of intentionality and what it means for participants.

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To help people apply this new information to their own lives, the participant binder contains a two-page list of possible eating and exercise goals. These goals illustrate what it means to set a *reachable* goal by asking participants to record the amount or frequency that they plan to engage in healthier eating or exercise, based on their unique situations. Some examples include, choosing to eat 2 servings of fruit each day, changing from whole milk to fat-free milk, or replacing French fries with a salad for one meal during the week.

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Session 2 is called, "The ABCs of Healthier Eating." In this class, participants are introduced to ChooseMyPlate as a way to understand portion sizes and healthier food choices. They learn about how to balance their calories when eating, which foods they should increase and decrease for better health, and the importance of eating a variety of foods. They hear about the 5 food groups, as well as how to choose wisely from each group; for example, choosing fish over red meat. A very important discussion during session 2 is the notion of "empty" calories, such as those found in packaged foods, which can increase a person's weight but not give them healthy energy or nutrients.

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Session 2 includes active learning to help people understand how they can replace processed foods with whole foods. Good examples include encouraging people to eat an apple rather than commercial applesauce, or a handful of walnuts instead of a granola bar. Based on their own likes and dislikes, they consider how they might add more vegetables and fruit to their diets.

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Session 3 is called, "Food Labels and Portion Control." During this class, participants learn how to analyze and understand a food label, especially the serving size. Discussion focuses on using food labels to reduce calories by understanding how many serving sizes are in a package. This is illustrated with an activity where they calculate the number of calories in a half-serving versus two servings. Didactic learning also includes reading the food label to see how much fat and salt the item contains. Again, using ChooseMyPlate, participants learn how to control their portions by filling half their plates with fruits and vegetables for as many meals as possible. Also provided are tips for controlling food intake, such as having a glass of water about 10 minutes before a meal.

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This session often makes an impression on people because they tend to eat a lot of packaged and convenience foods. The effect is even greater if participants are asked during Session 2 to bring labels from their favorite foods to class for Session 3. Instructors should plan to bring in a lot of food labels as well. Analyzing labels from foods the participants commonly eat can have a big impact on their

understanding of where their calories are coming from. In order to personalize the information, participants get multiple tips on how to reduce their portions, and they record 3 ways they will control portions in the coming week.

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Session 4 is called, “Let’s Get Moving!” Although they’ll exercise in every class, this is the session where people learn about the benefits of physical activity. They’re offered many suggestions for safe and simple ways to become more active. This includes helping them identify exercises that they might actually enjoy doing. Remember, the best exercise is the one you like to do!

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To further personalize this information, participants review an Activity Pyramid, which shows exercises they can do 2 or 3 times a week, and those they can do 3 to 5 times a week. A strong emphasis is placed on finding enjoyable exercises and making a commitment to doing them between classes. To help them understand why this is important, active learning involves helping them calculate how often they move during a typical day. Many people are surprised by how much time they spend sitting or lying down while awake. Many of us believe that we move around more than we actually do!

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Session 5 is called, “Eating Out.” It acknowledges that, while that dining out is fun and a valued social activity, it can present challenges to maintaining a healthy diet. But, since NEW-R doesn’t require giving up what is fun, people learn how to be intentional at restaurants. This includes watching portion sizes, and choosing the healthiest options from the menu. This is often easiest when you look up the menu ahead of time and plan what you’re going to eat. That way, you get the maximum enjoyment for the minimum hassle.

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Techniques for eating out are further personalized when participants complete charts showing how they plan to replace unhealthy foods with healthier restaurant choices. For example, they might order marinara sauce rather than cream sauce on a pasta dish. They also learn how to use the Calorie King® book and online calculators to determine the calorie content of their favorite restaurant foods, and how to reduce calories by making different choices. If possible, it’s ideal for the whole class to visit a local fast food restaurant to practice ordering a healthier option over an unhealthier one.

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Session 6 is called, “Meal Planning and Thrifty Shopping.” Here, participants learn the value of meal planning, involving both healthier diet options as well as saving money. They’re shown how to use a meal planner, which starts with checking for the foods they have on-hand before going to the store. This session also provides strategies for sticking to a food budget by setting aside grocery money in an envelope used only for that purpose. Participants also discuss how to cut costs while buying healthy foods, such as clipping coupons or watching for weekly sales, buying frozen vegetables and fruits instead of fresh ones, and making one meal during the week for which the leftovers will be incorporated into a second meal.

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Many people believe that eating healthy foods is expensive and it can be. But it’s also cheaper than other buying habits. For example, a bag of fresh oranges can cost the same per serving as a large bag of potato chips. The oranges will last longer and are obviously healthier. This session is further personalized by learning how to apply the meal planner, as well as by having participants record exactly how they plan to eat more fruits and vegetables during the week.

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Session 7 is called, “Let’s Get Cooking.” Here, they learn the value of cooking at home, and how to prepare healthy meals. They’re given tips for preparing lower-fat and lower-calorie meals. They also analyze a meal they commonly prepare, and learn how to reduce its fat and sugar content. Participants discuss how, even though it can take more time, cooking at home can help them eat more nutritious meals and save money.

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To guide participants towards healthier choices, they learn to use a stoplight analogy to categorize foods. A green light means the food is healthy, yellow light means acceptable, and red light represents an unhealthy choice. A 2-page handout contains tips to reduce calories and fat when cooking, such as replacing heavy cream with plain yogurt, or substituting olive oil for butter. Participants also create a written plan for how they’ll use healthier ingredients, such as replacing salt with a non-sodium seasoning like lemon pepper.

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The final Session 8 is called, “Celebrating Accomplishments.” This gives participants the opportunity to identify and celebrate 3 changes they’ve made since joining NEW-R. As part of the celebration, they’re reminded that change is a process that builds over time, and that if they stick with their new habits, they’re more likely to lose weight. Participants also are awarded a framed certificate of completion.

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It’s important that everyone have something to celebrate at Session 8. Some people will have lost weight, others will have made new friends in class, still others will have tried a new physical activity, and everyone will have learned about healthier eating and exercise.

Each participant makes a final *Plan for Being Intentional*, to use after the class ends. This plan includes such things as getting up at a reasonable hour, connecting with others, and eating healthy foods. They also discuss whether they want to meet on their own for continued support and to provide the gentle accountability that is so helpful in weight loss programs.

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A final aspect to consider when deciding to offer NEW-R is the role of the environment in weight management. The environment is a very important, and often overlooked, factor in successful weight loss. It’s not too hard to imagine why. People may have the best of intentions to lose weight, but will find it hard to succeed in unsupportive environments. For this reason, we encourage instructors, and the organizations offering NEW-R, to think carefully about how the program setting, along with participants’ home life, may support or undermine attempts at weight management.

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Many people believe that America is what we call “obesogenic,” which means a culture that promotes weight gain and discourages weight loss. How can that be? Well, just consider the large portion sizes served in many American restaurants, kids’ menus that give children a taste for unhealthy foods from a young age, the widespread consumption of high calorie specialty coffees and other drinks, and the tendency to drive everywhere, and you’ll see how our society ends up promoting an unhealthy lifestyle. But, there are ways to counter an obesogenic environment.

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Let’s first consider the cultural environment, and how it might be altered to support healthier eating and exercise. By culture, we’re referring to the attitudes, customs, and beliefs that characterize a group of people. Many of us live and work in more than one culture, each with its own unique impact on weight

management. There are no hard and fast rules, but it is useful to consider participants' home environment, and how it may support or hinder healthy behaviors. Will NEW-R participants find support at home to change their eating habits? Will other family or friends want to join in with exercise, or will they resist it?

By the same token, consider your organization or program setting. Does it promote a wellness culture beyond offering NEW-R? Are other wellness classes or exercise groups also taught? Are staff encouraged to think about their own wellness? If meals or snacks are available, are they healthy ones?

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Chances are, you'll find you have some work to do in promoting a wellness culture within your organization. This isn't unusual, and we've identified some weight-positive attitudes and beliefs that can help. First, it's important for everyone -- from leadership to direct service staff to service users -- to believe that people can change their health habits. Both spoken and unspoken cues need to be given, showing that everyone is capable of having a healthy lifestyle. There are two key attitudes here that may be hard to convey, but with practice, this can be done. First, is the message that healthy food tastes good. Second, is the notion that exercise feels good. Both things are true, but many people need support to embrace them. Your organization should offer ample evidence that healthier lifestyles are achievable.

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In supporting participants and staff to embrace weight-positive customs, start by helping them think about how to choose the healthiest options during family and community celebrations. They can even learn how to make a signature healthy dish to bring to parties. Serve healthy options during work celebrations, and resist serving unhealthy ones even as a "treat." These are ways to role model making better choices. You also can help participants and staff identify the healthiest restaurants and grocery stores near where they work and live, to help reduce the impact of our obesogenic environment. Also, adding multiple wellness activities to your service array will support people in their continued quest for a healthier lifestyle.

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It's also important to consider people's physical environment at home. Is it safe for people to take walks where they live? Do they have space or equipment to exercise at home? Do they have cooking facilities, such as an oven and a refrigerator? Some of these same questions apply to your program, along with whether you have a vending machine stocked with healthy options, such as nuts, dried fruits, or packs of humus with whole grain crackers. If your budget allows, consider providing everyone with a FitBit® or pedometer, or offer prizes to people who start walking clubs and log a certain number of steps. See whether some meetings can be turned into walking meetings. Incentivizing fitness, making it fun, and building it into everyone's daily routine can encourage healthy and happy people at your organization -- both service providers and service users.

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Finally, it's important to consider people's time and schedules. Many of us believe we simply cannot find the time to exercise. It's true that modern life can be stressful and stretched thin. But, it's often the case that, once people examine how they're spending their time, they can squeeze in some exercise, even if only for 15 to 20 minutes. Remember, everyone has the same number of hours in a day, they just have different priorities for how they use them. Once they become more physically active, they'll most likely feel better and want to free up more time for exercise.

Here again, the concept of intentionality is important for everyone. If we eat mindfully during the day, we're more likely to eat less and enjoy it more.

Also, we can't emphasize enough the value of menu planning, shopping, and cooking at home. This is the best way for people to control what and how much they eat, while also saving money.

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