

## **Podcast Transcript on Why To Use NEW-R**

LR: Hello. My name is Dr. Lisa Razzano. I'm here with Dr. Judith Cook, Director of the University of Illinois Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Today, we'll be talking about the weight and well-being intervention, called *Nutrition and Exercise for Wellness and Recovery* or *NEW-R*, which is available from the UIC Solutions Suite.

LR: Thanks for joining me today, Judith. Please tell our listeners about NEW-R, and why mental health agencies or self-help groups should offer it to their members. How can a weight management program promote mental health recovery?

JC: That's a very good question. We hear it often. We know from research that overweight people report that their weight can have a negative effect on their emotional well-being, whether or not they have a mental health condition. People who are overweight tend to experience negative moods, such as depression and anxiety, more often than people who are not overweight. They also are more likely to have lower self-esteem. In addition, overweight people talk about "fat shaming," where they are the target of humiliating and critical comments about their size. When people are afraid of being mocked like this, that fear can cause them to stay at home and avoid interacting with others, leading to unhealthy social isolation. In addition, people who are significantly overweight face discrimination in the workplace, often being denied jobs or promotions in favor of thinner people. Unfortunately, a large percentage of people with mental health conditions are overweight or obese, which puts them at high risk for these negative emotional impacts as well as for physical health problems. Offering NEW-R classes can help people begin to address their eating and exercise habits in an accepting and encouraging atmosphere.

LR: What makes NEW-R different from the other weight management programs that people could join in the community?

JC: First, I want to affirm our belief that people in mental health recovery should access natural community supports whenever possible. This is an important part of community participation. However, we also know that many people don't feel welcomed in commercial weight loss programs. Additionally, many can't afford to pay the membership fees or buy the special foods that are used in these programs. We wanted to create a welcoming weight management program that can be offered for free in any community-based program or self-help group. NEW-R emphasizes the value of making small changes and setting realistic goals. By meeting participants where they're at, NEW-R offers a unique experience for many people who have tried and failed at dieting in the past.

LR: But many behavioral health providers are putting less emphasis on agency-based groups. Why offer a NEW-R group instead of one-to-one support for healthier eating and exercise?

JC: NEW-R places a large emphasis on the importance of social and peer support for changing habits. It can be very difficult to go it alone when trying to alter your lifestyle.

We stress this when we talk to people about joining a NEW-R group. We make sure to explain that this is not a standard “mental health” group. Instead, it’s a class where people learn about healthier eating and exercise, try out new foods and different physical activities, and give and receive support. If they were to join a commercial weight loss program, they would most likely attend groups as well, since that’s a typical expectation in those kinds of programs. Additionally, we believe that it’s important to provide a safe and welcoming group environment to help counter the rejection and social isolation that many overweight people in recovery end up experiencing.

LR: Does NEW-R work? Do people really learn healthier eating and exercise habits to lose weight?

JC: In our pilot study of NEW-R, we found that participants lost an average of 3 pounds by the end of the 2-month class. These benefits continued after the class was over, leading to an average weight loss of 10 pounds per person at the end of a 6-month follow-up.

JC: While 3 to 10 pounds may not seem like a lot of weight loss for a person who is obese, keep two things in mind. First, this program helps people get started with lifestyle changes, and long-lasting results take time. Participation in NEW-R is designed to help people get started in making the changes they want, and encourages these changes at a slow enough pace to be healthy and sustainable. Second, we know that modest decreases in weight can have significant health benefits, even if a person’s appearance doesn’t change drastically.

JC: After being in NEW-R, our pilot study also showed that participants had significant increases in their knowledge about nutrition and physical activity. They reported enjoying the classes and opportunities to receive encouraging support for their health goals. We saw that NEW-R can help people to lose weight, feel better, and become more socially connected.

LR: Thank you Judith. And thank you all for your time today. We are pleased to offer NEW-R as part of our Solutions Suite to promote wellness for people in recovery from mental health conditions.