**Food Rules**

We can develop rules around food, whether this is in childhood; from the influence of our parents / carers, in adolescence when we start to get more freedom, or in adulthood when we are in control.

**Definition of rule:**

1. An accepted principle or instruction that states the way things are or should be done, and tells you what you are allowed or not allowed to do. (Ref Cambridge dictionary).
2. An authoritative principle set forth to guide behaviour or action (Ref: Oxford dictionary)an [accepted](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accepted) [principle](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/principle) or [instruction](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/instruction) that [states](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/state) the way things are or should be done, and [tells](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tell) you what you are [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) or are not [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) to do: an [accepted](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accepted) [principle](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/principle) or [instruction](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/instruction) that [states](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/state) the way things are or should be done, and [tells](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tell) you what you are [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) or are not [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) to do: an [accepted](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accepted) [principle](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/principle) or [instruction](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/instruction) that [states](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/state) the way things are or should be done, and [tells](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tell) you what you are [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) or are not [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) to do: an [accepted](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/accepted) [principle](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/principle) or [instruction](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/instruction) that [states](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/state) the way things are or should be done, and [tells](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tell) you what you are [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) or are not [allowed](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allow) to do:.

Some rules may be helpful for us, such as; don’t drink sugary drinks, eat regular meals, eat at least five fruit and veg a day, etc.

However some rules may be less helpful for us, such as;

* When I go to the seaside I must eat fish & chips, ice-cream, doughnuts etc.
* It’s the weekend therefore I can have takeaway, treats, alcohol etc.
* Its Christmas therefore I can eat and drink what I want,
* At parties I can eat / drink what I want etc.
* When I am tried I need something sugary to make me feel better.
* When I am stressed I deserve to eat something nice / at least I can eat what I want.
* I am in control therefore I can eat what I want, when I want.
* When I go to the cinema I must eat popcorn, ice cream, sweets, chocolate etc.

We may not be aware of many of our rules, however once a rule is established it can remain unchallenged and regularly influence our behaviours for many years.

**The following exercise will help you to become mindful (aware) of your rules and evaluate (work out) whether they are helpful for you, and something you still agree with; if they are not, then you can develop a new more effective rule for you.**

**Rule challenging exercise**

1. **Identify the old rule:** It’s the weekend therefore I can have takeaway, treats, alcohol etc.
2. **What are the consequences of this rule?** Two-three days / evenings a week I overindulge in unhealthy foods and alcohol, massively increasing my calorie intake over the week (1 bottle of wine = approx. 640 calories, ten pints of larger = approx. 1800 calories, 12 “ pizza with meat approx. 2110 calories, average bar of chocolate 200-300 calories), over a weekend I can get through a lot of food, causing weight gain. Feelings of guilt, bloating, lethargy, hangovers, reduced productivity, frustration. I am constantly playing catch-up; trying to undo the damage I caused on a weekend and therefore never losing weight. But I enjoy having the treats whilst I am eating / drinking them
3. **Is this rule helpful for me?** No, it’s too extreme; I could have a more balanced / realistic approach; where I allow some treats but remain mindful of the overall impact on my weekly intake.
4. **New rule:** The weekends count! (for my health). Eat a balanced diet and exercise. Be mindful of what I am eating and how this will make me feel.

**Now it’s your turn ………………**

1. **Identify the old rule:**
2. **What are the consequences of this rule?**
3. **Is this rule helpful for me?**
4. **New rule:**

**Rule challenging exercise**

1. **Identify the old rule:**
2. **What are the consequences of this rule?**
3. **Is this rule helpful for me?**
4. **New rule:**
5. **Identify the old rule:**
6. **What are the consequences of this rule?**
7. **Is this rule helpful for me?**
8. **New rule:**
9. **Identify the old rule:**
10. **What are the consequences of this rule?**
11. **Is this rule helpful for me?**
12. **New rule:**