

Self-Efficacy and Cognitive Therapy for Weight Loss and Management
By Dr. Laura Fadell

Ever wonder how the participants on *The Biggest Loser* actually do it? I know, you're thinking...the ranch, the personal trainers, and the healthy food right? Right - all true. But seriously, those amenities are not what make it happen. Sure, those perks definitely help, but the key ingredient in this recipe is something psychologists have known about for decades – a little thing we call “self-efficacy.” Without self-efficacy a person will continue to fail – regardless of the new gym membership, personal trainer, cute workout clothes, and so forth. Also, some people might think that self-efficacy is the same as will power. It's not.

So what is self-efficacy and how do we get it? According to Albert Bandura, self-efficacy is defined as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives...a strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways.” In other words, a person must believe in his or her ability to succeed at a particular task in order to fully master that task. Sounds easy enough. But, like most things that sound easy, there's a catch. Self-efficacy is specific to the task – meaning just because you have great self-efficacy for some things does not mean you'll have it for everything. In fact, because most of us wanting to lose or manage weight have previously experienced some form of disappointment in this area, deep down we are still expecting to fail. Basically, our self-defeating thoughts (whether we are aware of them or not) contribute to our lack of self-efficacy.

An excellent way to gain self-efficacy for weight loss and management is through cognitive therapy. Cognitive therapy, which is most commonly used to treat depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and stress, is a proven method for changing the way a person *thinks*. How a person *thinks* directly influences how a person *feels*, which in turn affects how a person *behaves*. For example, if you want to lose 30 pounds, what might you likely be telling yourself? I bet it goes something like this:

| Bad Thoughts → | Feelings → | Behavior → |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| “I've tried before and failed” | Defeated | Sabotage weight loss |
| “Everyone else is having it” | Deprived | Eat the cake |
| “I have so much to lose” | Overwhelmed | Procrastinate |

So what is cognitive therapy? Cognitive therapy is based on the notion that a person's feelings and behaviors are influenced by their perceptions and thoughts. It's time-limited (usually 6 to 20 sessions) and focuses on helping you go from a negative, self-defeating pattern of thought to one that is more positive and self-enhancing; and it equips you with the tools needed to maintain this change on your own. Homework is vital to the program

and is always designed specifically for each individual's needs. Once you begin to change your thinking and experience success, your self-efficacy will soar!

If you find yourself engaging in unhealthy self-talk, such as “all or nothing” thinking, “Awfulizing”, discounting the positives while maximizing the negatives, overestimating the likelihood of a negative outcome, using words like “should” and “must”, or self-blaming – and you're looking to improve your self-efficacy for weight loss and management, you may want to consider cognitive therapy to help put you in the *right frame of mind*. Good Luck!

Dr. Fadell is a fully licensed clinical psychologist and a certified school psychologist. She completed her undergraduate work at the University of Michigan, majoring in psychology and her graduate work at Wayne State University where she obtained her Masters and Doctorate degrees, also in psychology. After completing her graduate studies, Dr. Fadell received training at the well respected Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research under the direction of Aaron T. Beck, MD and Judith S. Beck, PhD, focusing on anxiety, depression and stress and weight management. To further her skills in psychological assessment, she also received her certification as a school psychologist.

Services offered by Dr. Fadell include individual, family and couples therapy (ages 5 through adult); cognitive therapy for weight loss and maintenance for children and adults; women's issues; and psychological testing for ADHD and learning challenges. Dr. Fadell is in private practice in Bloomfield Hills and on staff at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital. Visit www.drfadell.com for more information.