

Welcome to session 6

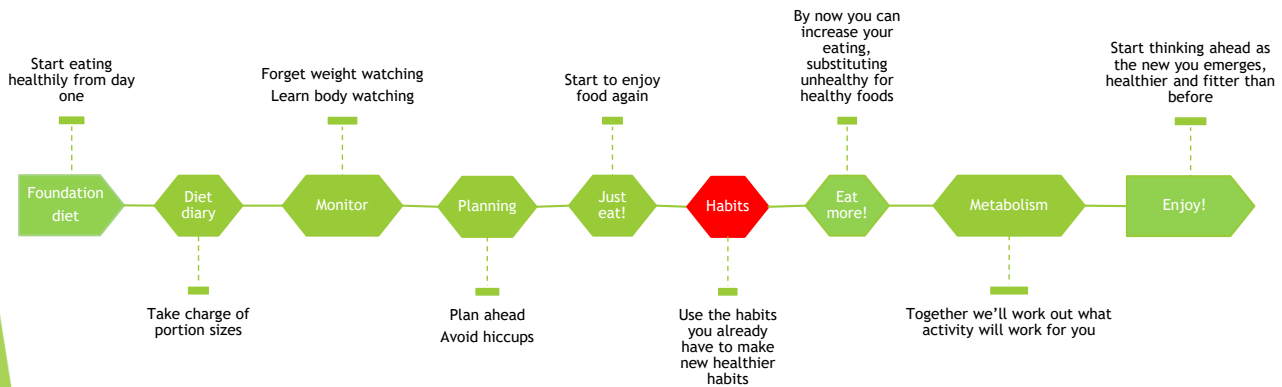
This is Wendy Shillam welcoming you to the next diet workshop.

This session is about your eating habits.

Let's go to the next slide to review the programme

The programme

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9



You've come a long way in six weeks. You have undoubtedly modified some habits already that perhaps, you never thought you'd change. But have you changed these habits for life – or have you simply shelved some habits only for them to come rolling back at the end of the diet?



What is a habit?

- Why we all succumb to habitual actions

What triggers a habit?

- Is it a treat, or something else?

Breaking habits

- Why habits are so difficult to break?

Transforming habits

- How you can transform a habit

Today I'll be talking about habits both bad habits you might like to change and good habits you'd like to cultivate. By resolving to eat more healthily you will inevitably have to confront some of the things you do habitually and potentially change them. This session gives you the tools to do that successfully.



*Most of the time what we do is what we do most of the time.
Sometimes we do something new.*

(Townsend & Bever, 2001, p. 2)

- ▶ Habits are learned behaviour
- ▶ They are reinforced by;
 - ▶ Repetition
 - ▶ Reward



Image: Doggiebuddy.com

We all think that habits, once formed, are fixed. But that simply isn't true. All sorts of things nudge us out of old habits into new routines. Think about where you used to do your main food shopping ten or twenty years ago, and now consider where you shop today. I'm willing to bet that you didn't make a conscious effort to change your custom. One day it just happened.

I'm reminded of the comment that Townsend and Bever made in their seminal book about human nature.

Most of the time, what we do - is what we do most of the time.

Sometimes we do something new.

Anyone who has ever owned a dog knows about habits. If I start to put my walking shoes on, my dog will immediately wag her tail in anticipation of coming out with me. Over the years she has learned that we never go out for a walk without the ritual of putting on the right shoes. And if you've ever tried to train a dog, you'll know that food makes the best rewards to persuade them to do something.

This doggy example illustrates the two factors that are essential in laying down habits, first there must be repetition. If you have a bad eating habit, it is likely to have developed over many months or even years. And that habit will be linked to the dopamine rush that a food treat provides. Dopamine is the brain hormone that is triggered by our experience of pleasure.

So, habits, good ones as well as bad, are reinforced by repetition and reward.



- ▶ Habits are formed when a reward is taken and dopamine, the pleasure hormone, is released into the brain.
- ▶ But, there is some evidence to suggest that once a habit is formed, the dopamine is released in anticipation *before* the treat is received.

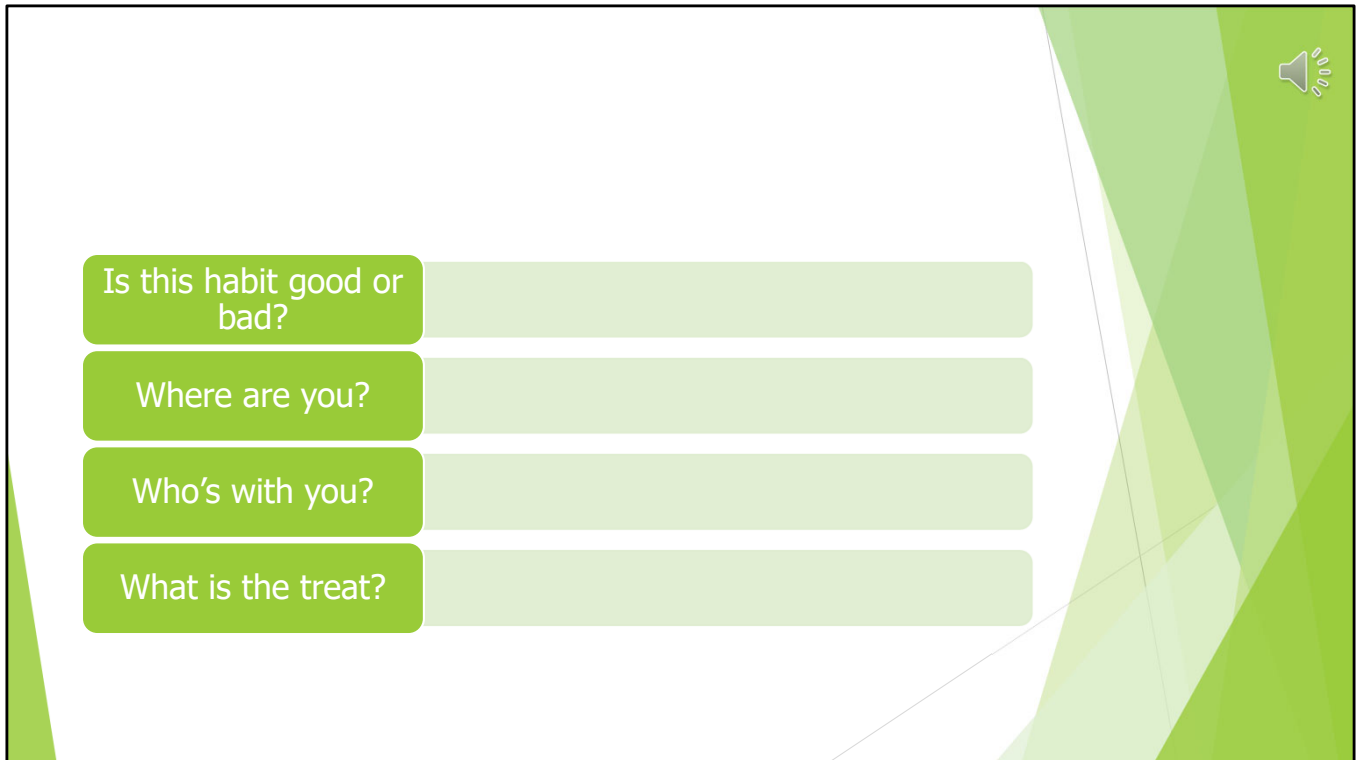


Image: Goodfreephotos

Habits are formed by the simple mechanism of a learned response to a nice treat. But that habit is reinforced by context. If you always sit down in a particular armchair in the evening and eat a few chocolates from a box you keep on the coffee table, then the dopamine is probably being released as soon as you sit down and look at the box. The reminder of the treat is enough. And if you enjoy sweet things then I bet that just looking at this image will already be making your mouth water.

What I find interesting about this fact is that the eating of the treat isn't actually necessary for the dopamine reward to be delivered. This gives us a window of opportunity to modify that pleasure into something

healthier.



Is this habit good or bad?

Where are you?

Who's with you?

What is the treat?

List your habits – good and bad

Now here's a bit of thinking work to do. Find yourself a comfortable chair and muse.

List a few eating habits you have which you think are healthy?

List a few that you think might be unhealthy?

One of two of each is fine.

Think of the context, where are you, who is with you, when these occasions occur?

Now think of the reward. Is food the only treat, or do other things come into it, such as being in a fancy restaurant, or finally finding time to have a rest at the end of a busy day.

Now keep these in mind as you view the next slides...



Imagine that habits are a bit like gears. You can suppress them by changing down a gear, and impress them by changing up a gear.

Let's think of an example. What if every Friday night you meet your friends in the same pub and always drink a bit too much? Not such a bad habit, but a habit that, if it is repeated every single Friday night, might contribute to your becoming overweight over time. The repetition of context (the nice pub and friends, the end of the week) the treat (a cool drink) triggers the reward. That pleasant feeling we all recognise. Let your breath go, take a long deep breath out, and you can replicate the feeling a bit.

A habit, such as going out for a drink with your mates, becomes more ingrained the more it is repeated. Remember the quote, *'Most of the time what we do is what we do most of the time.'*

Studies have shown that about 45% of our waking hours are involved in repetitive activities. If they are healthy habits, like going out for a walk in the park, then the repetition will be a good thing. Whether good or bad, in time habits become automatic and we don't exercise conscious controls on them.

But before we go onto the next slide, it is worth considering what the treat actually is? Is it the alcohol – a powerful stimulant? Is it the company? Is it the location? Is it the relief of a week's work finished? Whatever the treat, the result is a shot of dopamine to the brain.

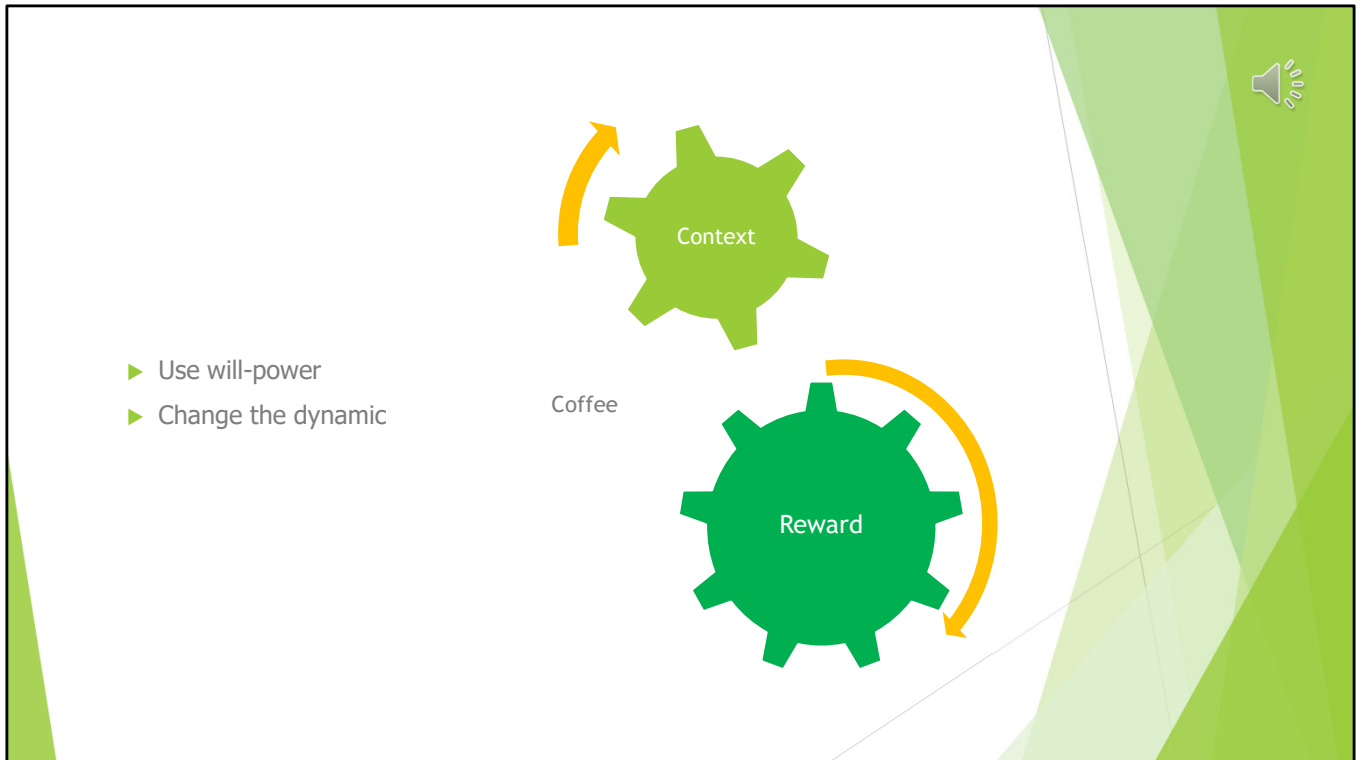


So how can you break a habit?

Idea no 1 is to change the context – the location where the habit was formed. In the diagram the context gear has changed shape, so is unable to drive the reaction.

Using the Friday night pub as an example, you could decide to meet your friends somewhere different. Where are your good habits formed? Perhaps one of those locations might be feasible? You could decide to avoid the situation all together, but that would put a strain on your social life and possibly leave you feeling left-out.

Changing habits shouldn't be about missing out on pleasure – simply about deciding not to include unhealthy food in that 'fun' event.



Let's go back to the pub habit and try another tack. This is my second suggestion. You could decide to go to the pub, but forego the treat. You'll still enjoy the reward of the event, and if it is already a habit, you might be surprised how little you miss the wine. Remember scientists think that the dopamine rush we find so pleasant is often delivered whether we take the treat or not.

Using will-power is quite a difficult approach, though it works in situations where you are determined to succeed. You might decide that you'll go to the pub, but you'll drink coffee instead of wine. Though this might seem difficult at first, you will still be with your friends

and you'll still be in the same, presumably comfortable, location.

At this point I'd like you to recall the second half of the quotation I used at the beginning of the slide show,

'Sometimes we do something new'.

Chances are that you won't go to the same pub, every Friday night for the rest of your life. Things change. You could decide that you should look out for an opportunity to modify the whole situation. That's option 3.



We've tried avoiding the situation and we've thought about using will-power to avoid the unhealthy treat. What else could we do?

The first ideas I've explained act to de-couple the gears, by throwing a spanner in the works, if you like. A different approach, which has been shown to be very effective is to modify the situation by improving it.

For the time being let's assume that you're not going to change the location, simply the treat. Try to think of a treat that would feel even better than a few too many glasses of wine, but would actually be better for you. In order to do this for yourself you'll need to examine in a

bit more detail what is pleasant about the occasion.

What is pleasant here?



The Crown Inn Stratton St Margaret

What is pleasant here

This is The Crown Inn, Stratton St Margaret. The sort of local we'd all like to know about.

For me the pleasure of an evening in the pub is the relaxation, the warmth of the open fire, the convivial atmosphere, the gossip with friends and the comfy armchairs. You may have a whole different set of enjoyments. But I'm pretty sure that the 'bad' eating habit will only be a tiny piece of it.

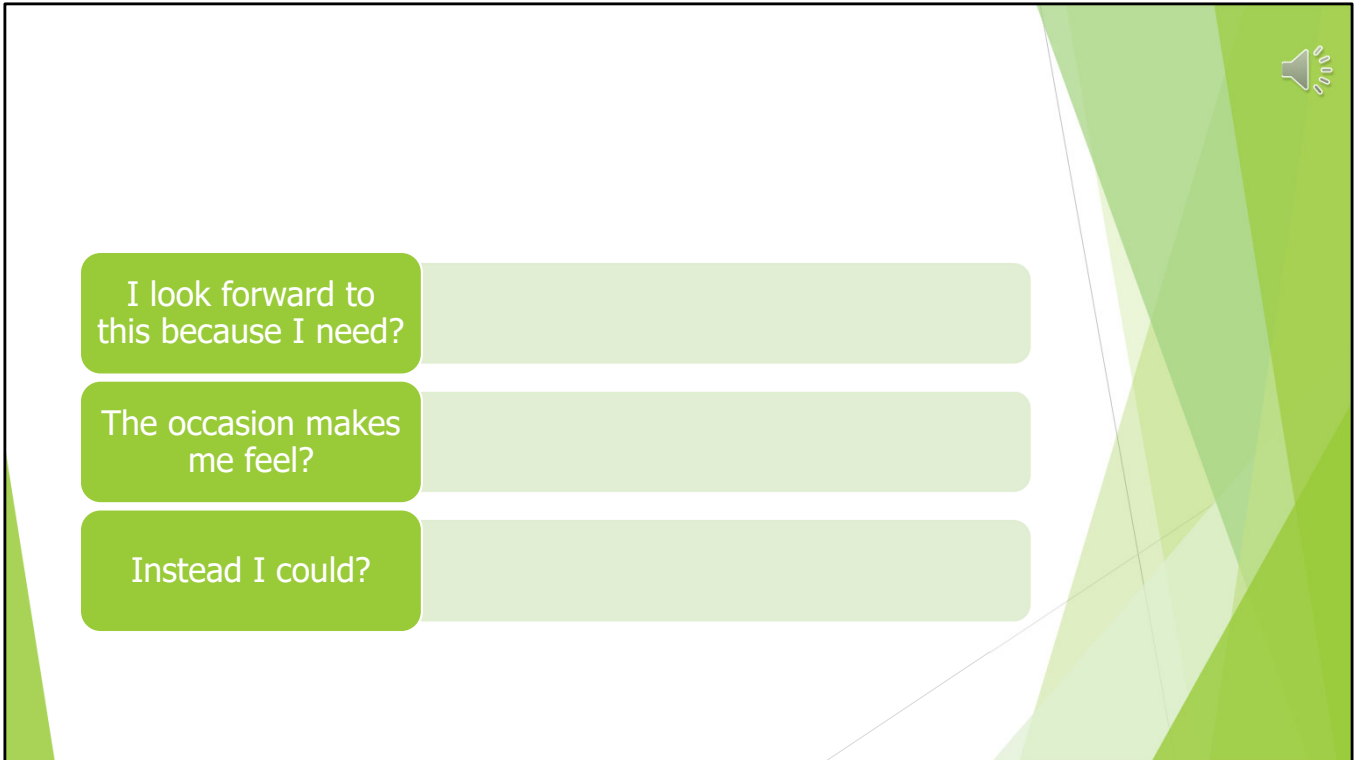
What can be improved?



Just as a suggestion, why not eat a meal in the pub, instead of simply drinking? Now I know that on the face of it, that can come more expensive. But perhaps because you perceive the meal as an even better treat, you will respect the occasion a little more?

Wine should be taken with food. So, if your concern was drinking too many glasses of wine in the pub, you could decide to limit your wine to one small glass of something expensive, and spend the rest of your wine budget on food. The local pub might not be able to offer anything quite as sophisticated as the vitals shown in the right-hand image. But I hope you get the idea. Food with alcohol will provide the nutrition I need after a hard

day's work, and will naturally limit my alcohol intake. Add a glass of water alongside, or fill a large glass with ice and a small portion of wine and I probably won't miss the plonk.



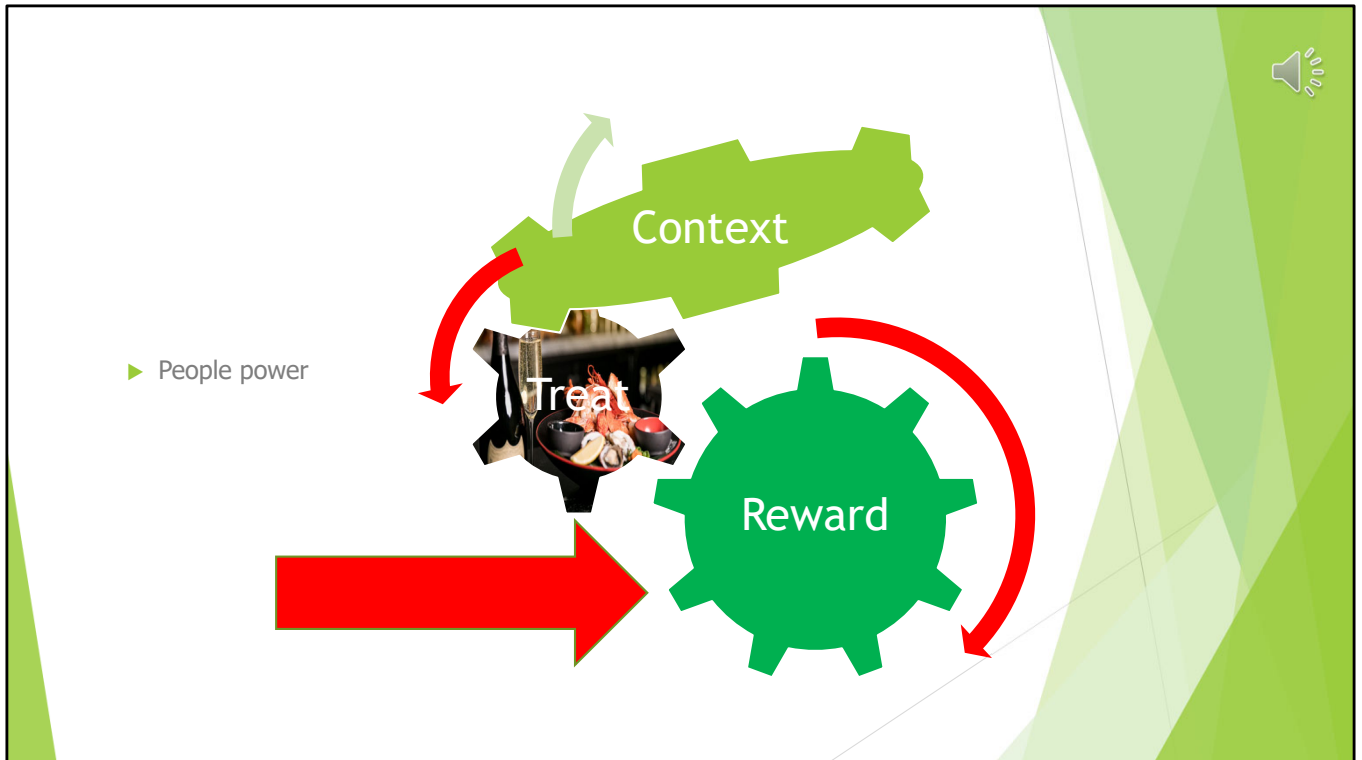
Go back and review the bad habits you wrote down at the beginning of this session.

Why do you look forward to these occasions? What needs are being satisfied?

How does it make you feel?

You can consider positive feelings when you are enjoying the treat, but also negative ones that you might experience afterwards. For example, after a boozy evening, I might suffer bit of a hangover in the morning and a shock when I get on the scales.

Now think about how you might transform you bad habit into a good one.



Following on from the last exercise you can always change the location as well as the treat. If you are alone that might be quite easy to achieve. But your secret weapon might well be your friends.

Engaging the support and help of friends will vastly improve your chances of changing habits like these successfully. However, you will find friends who just aren't very helpful. Go back to session 3, where I gave some advice in dealing with nay-sayers. Remember it's your choice.

The great thing about engaging the help of friends to improve a habit is that they will probably welcome that

change of habit too. These days we all want to get healthy.

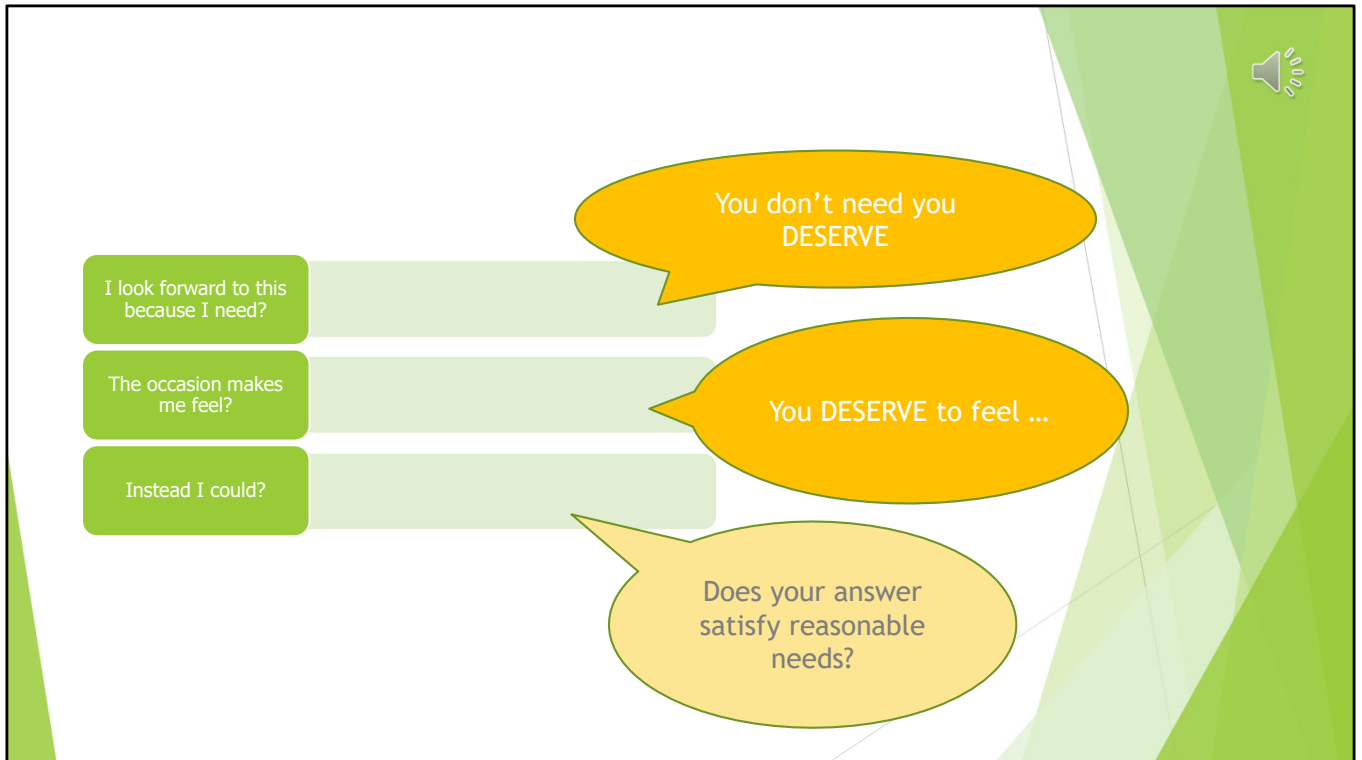
But remain a little cautious about labelling all your less than perfect habits as bad habits. We are none of us saints, and sometimes we need to feel relaxed about our imperfections.

I look forward to this because I need?	
The occasion makes me feel?	
Instead I could?	

Is there such a thing as a bad habit?

We all tend to overlay our bad habits with loads of judgmental ‘stuff’ that actually doesn’t help us. Learning to eat healthily is as much about recognising the value of healthy food and the pleasures of eating occasions.

Go back to the answers you gave in slide 13. Underline the needs and the feeling you expressed in the first two sections of the grid. Have a think about any more before you go onto the next slide. Remember this is just for your benefit. Be as honest as you like with yourself.



Transforming bad habits into good habits

We do things because they satisfy us in some way. They are all symptoms of needs. Sometimes we translate our needs wrongly.

A thirst might be translated as a need for wine, when actually it is simply a need for liquid.

A hunger might be completely justified, but a balanced meal might satisfy that hunger more than a cream bun.

Because hunger and thirst are such fundamental feelings, we can misunderstand the signs. Sometimes we hunger for things like affection, warmth, recognition,

relaxation or diversion.

There is a limit on how much food and drink can satisfy those hungers. There need be no limits to our enjoyment of activity, conviviality or relaxation. So, look out for different outlets for these desires.



To sum up. There are the several ways you can break habits. All of them are achievable. Some will work in certain contexts, others won't. There is nothing to stop you experimenting with different approaches and see what works for you.

But it shouldn't be a beat yourself over the head approach. We all need downtime, relaxation and enjoyment. But don't translate those very real needs into food or drink.



- ▶ Make one change to your habits this week.
- ▶ Observe how successful it was.
- ▶ Continue to monitor and record your eating and your body composition.
- ▶ If you continue to lose weight you may add one more portion to your food group allowance for this week.

Attack just one habit this week. See where it takes you. Remember that as long as you continue to lose weight, you can add another portion of food from your choice of food group this week.



Read through the most important safety considerations this week. And remember that if you do go out and you do decide to drink one little glass of wine, because you've been on the wagon for the whole of this diet, and not eating a lot of food, any alcohol will go straight to your head.

Please read the safety instructions carefully. If you are confused, or unsure, please do not hesitate to contact me.

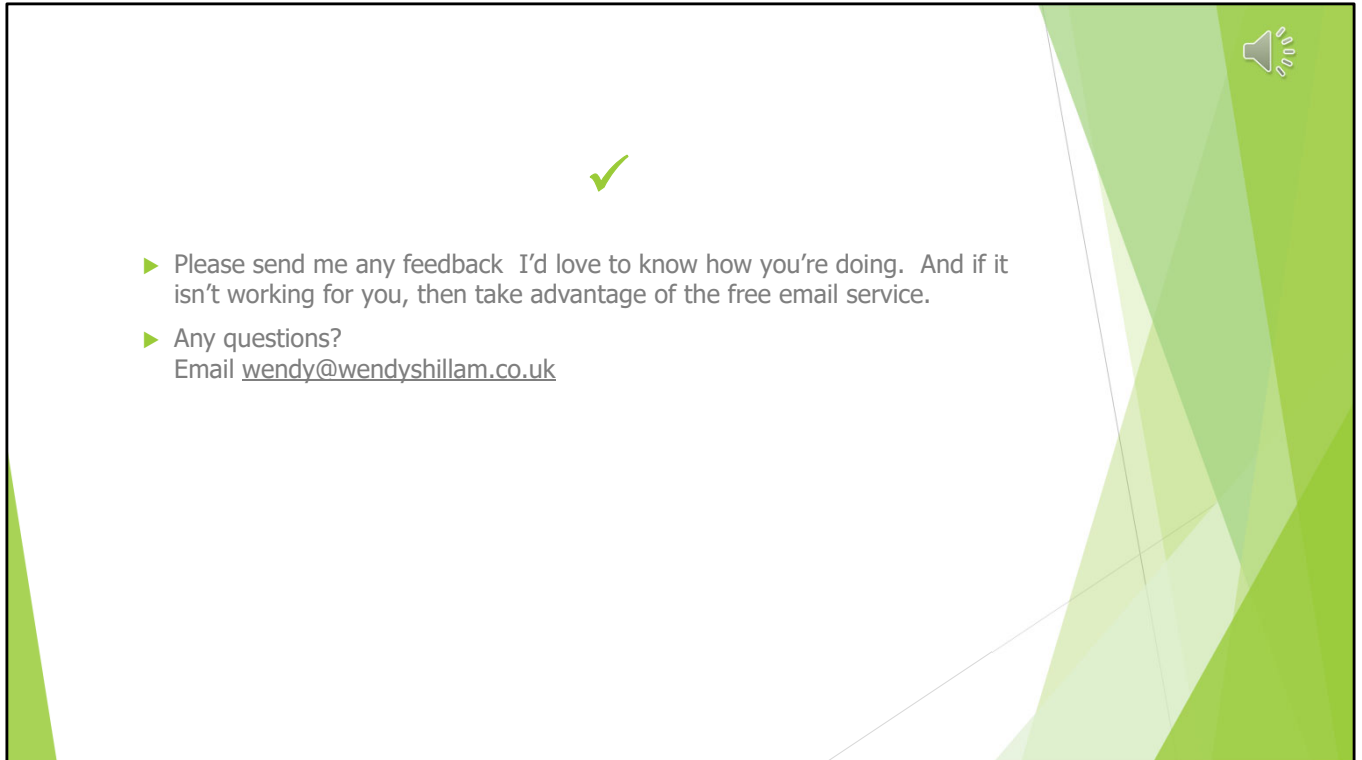


- ▶ In the next session we'll learn how your diet will naturally morph into a diet for life.
- ▶ We'll talk about maintenance a bit more.

Next week, we'll learn a little more about adding back extra foods to your diet.

We'll learn how your diet will naturally morph into a diet for life.

And I'll talk about maintenance a bit more.



Congratulations, you've completed two thirds of the course. Well done!

Please send me any feedback. I'd love to know how you're doing. I want to hear about your success, but if it isn't working for you, then take advantage of the free email service.

Any questions?

Email me, Wendy Shillam on wendy@wendyshillam.co.uk

Bye for now!