



THERAPEUTIC MEAL SUPPORT

Therapeutic Meal Support

'Meal support is a form of emotional support provided to a person struggling with an eating disorder before, during and after meals and snacks in an effort to increase the struggling person's success with meal/snack completion'. (Leichner 2005)

Therapeutic Meal Support (TMS) is the provision of emotional support during meal-times. This is provided by a psychotherapist or counsellor. They will help you to consume the food/meal and to become aware of, and redirect, any thoughts or behaviours that sabotage or get in the way of eating and recovery. Currently, TMS is provided individually over the phone or via Zoom.

The focus of Therapeutic Meal Support will be different for each client and depend on their individual food rules, rituals, fears, avoidance, thoughts and feelings.

For example, TMS might focus on your avoidance reaction to all or certain foods and/or meals or food you consider bad, risky or dangerous. Likewise, the focus might be on distressful thoughts and feelings you may experience when eating. For others, the support would involve helping you to reduce your anxiety around mealtimes or help you to challenge some of the food rules or routines you might have. Some support might help you to challenge habits you have around preparing or eating meals. For others, AMS might help teach you mindful eating techniques or to slow down your eating.

TMS might also involve, for example: exposure to fear, forbidden or trigger foods; the unlearning of conditioned eating disorder behaviours (e.g. restriction, slow eating, deconstructing food, cutting food into tiny pieces, taking tiny bites, etc.); confronting unhelpful or irrational thoughts about food and how it works with one's body; testing reality-based ideas; and much more.



During TMS you and the therapist might also set up 'experiments' or 'challenges' that pervade your attitude towards food or your eating behaviour. This can not only help you to break unhelpful habits; it can also help to reduce fear and anxiety around food and mealtimes.

Recovery and change require the development and maintenance new, more helpful and healthier eating habits that will reduce the effects of malnourishment or overeating. We understand that such changes can cause intense anxiety, especially when eating disordered thoughts, feelings and behaviours persist. TMS is one tool that can provide emotional and practical support that can help ease this transition and move towards a healthier relationship with food. Some of the benefits of Therapeutic Meal Support include:

- Decrease anxiety and fear around eating foods and dining at restaurants/other locations.
- Challenge unhelpful eating disordered rules and rituals.
- Practice ordering from a menu.
- Helps your home environment to become a safe place for meals.
- Practice and Increase mindful eating and listening to one's hunger and fullness body cues.
- Have accountability for your meal plan.
- Provides private support in a safe environment.
- Challenge feeling and thought barriers that keep you stuck.
- learns and practice tools and techniques to decrease fear and anxiety around food and the breaking of dietary rules and routines/rituals.
- Support with therapeutic exposures and skills learning and practice
- Practice regular eating and challenge your food fears.
- Identify, recognise, acknowledge, process and discuss thoughts and feelings in a safe, supportive environment.
- Learn practical tools to manage urges and binge eating while preparing and eating food/meal.
- Learn how to slow down eating, improve your eating environment and eat mindfully (for binge/emotional/over-eating).
- Work towards making food choices for yourself, with the eating disorder dialogue sabotaging or interfering with healthy, balanced choices.
- Complement your other support (e.g. psychotherapy or counselling) with practical, skills-based meal support (Therapeutic Meal Support is not a substitute for, but supplement to treatment (e.g. psychotherapy, counselling, dietetics etc.).