

Dr Susan Mitchell (00:00.33)

Keeping weight off after bariatric surgery is about more than protein and portion sizes. It's also about training your mind like a muscle. Don't go anywhere. Bariatric psychologist Dr. Connie joins me to talk about the mental tools you can use right now to stay on track after the honeymoon phase ends.

I'm bariatric dietician, Dr. Susan Mitchell. You're listening to the Bariatric Surgery Success podcast. I'm so glad you're listening today because Dr. Connie's in the house and it matters where you get your nutrition and mental health information. Here's what you need to know now. Joining me in the studio is Atlanta based bariatric psychologist, Dr. Connie Stapleton.

She doesn't hold back. If you're a regular listener, you know she gets right to the core of the issues. She always shares practical ways for you to improve your relationships with food, with other people, but most importantly, with yourself. And we're doing that today with mental health tools that you can use. Don't forget.

You can find the links to Dr. Connie's website and to her books, as well as her podcast called Weight Loss Information in the show notes. Hello, Dr. Connie.

Dr Susan Mitchell (01:33.166)

I'm so glad you're here today to celebrate the 200th episode of my podcast, Bariatric Surgery Success. Can you believe it? Thank you. And we've done a lot of those together.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (01:43.308)

That's fantastic. Congratulations.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (01:48.48)

We have and I'm honored every time.

Dr Susan Mitchell (01:50.998)

Yeah, we've had so much fun. Well, today, we're talking about mastering mind skills to keep weight off after bariatric surgery. And here's the blunt truth. bariatric surgery is a powerful tool. But as you've said, Dr. Connie, many times on this podcast, it doesn't rewire your brain, those old habits, those emotional triggers, the thought patterns, they sneak back in and they can sabotage

your success if you don't address them. So let's get practical today. Let's get in the weeds with the mental tools that work. And this tool is close to my heart, ditch the diet mentality. So talk us through the cognitive behavioral therapy, also known as CBT, that you use with the diet mentality.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (02:44.148)

Absolutely, and I love the topic, ditch the diet mentality. That has got to go. So if you're going to maintain weight loss, it absolutely involves shifting away from a diet mindset, which is so hard for some people to do, but we have to have a permanent health focused mindset. instead of trying to rely on willpower,

Dr Susan Mitchell (02:48.11)

Hahahaha

Connie Stapleton, PhD (03:09.016)

which we know doesn't work, and restriction, which can set you up for going back for more, this approach uses cognitive reframing, changing your thinking, and a lot of self-compassion, which people aren't all that good at, to foster that healthy, sustainable lifestyle.

Dr Susan Mitchell (03:23.862)

Okay, so I'm hearing you say cognitive reframing and some people might be going, I don't really get that. So in this shifting away from a diet mentality, explain what cognitive reframing is.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (03:43.648)

Okay, so cognitive reframing is changing your thought. It's recognizing if you're thinking in a negative pattern, you're recognizing, you recognize you're feeling stress or anxiety or sadness, and you usually turn to food for that, to comfort that or give you coping. So once you can identify the emotions, then you find a healthier coping mechanism, not food.

but something like journaling or meditation, exercise, something instead of food. So you challenge that negative thought. Like, is this going to lead me to where I want to be? Or is this all or nothing? It's food or nothing. I exercise all the time or nothing. I eat the carbs or none of the carbs. You got to get rid of that. You have to have more flexibility and forgive yourself for if you screw up or a little setback, but focus on...

Dr Susan Mitchell (04:35.426)

Yeah.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (04:39.596)

the progress that you are making. Don't get hung up on those slip ups.

Dr Susan Mitchell (04:42.402)

Ooh, I like that. So cognitive reframing is the same as cognitive behavioral therapy or a component of it, just so that I'm clear.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (04:52.856)

It's a component of it. It's a component.

Dr Susan Mitchell (04:54.592)

Okay. Well, I totally feel that you have to reframe your perception of food because as dieticians, we hear forever, good food, bad food, I ate bad foods. You you have to ditch those labels because food is food. Some choices are much healthier than others and better for the body. And some choices are pretty lousy. So instead the focus is

Instead of looking at good and bad and judging yourself where you feel shame, you have to focus on fueling your body with those nutrition options most of the time while you allow yourself that occasional mindful indulgence. And notice I say mindful, it isn't picking up the bag of &Ms and going at it. It's deciding, okay, I'm gonna have some &Ms and I'm gonna have this little palm full of them. Dr. Connie, I feel that naming foods as good and bad makes you...

feel good or bad about yourself as a person, do you?

Connie Stapleton, PhD (05:56.106)

I agree with that completely. And as I'm listening to you, I'm thinking about how often people do use those terms. And I'm thinking, if those terms are stuck in your head, focus on when I eat this food, do I feel good physically?

as opposed to does it make me feel good for five minutes emotionally? We want to eat food that makes us feel good physically and leave the emotional stuff to emotional solutions that are healthy for you. So food isn't good or bad. It's a way for us to have energy to live and we can eat food that makes us feel physically good.

or physically bad. Healthy food makes us feel physically good. So if you're going to use those terms, use them in that way, which makes more sense.

Dr Susan Mitchell (06:46.188)

Yeah. And it also has to be tasty. I'm all about, know, food should be enjoyable and tasty. Food is all about love and family and emotions and special times. So I think people think when I say the word healthy, they have to turn and go, And it's just not true. Healthy food can be and is so delicious. It's just learning how to make it so.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (06:50.261)

Yes!

Connie Stapleton, PhD (06:57.013)

Connie Stapleton, PhD (07:04.009)

It's one hour plus finish.

Dr Susan Mitchell (07:15.758)

I'm a big fan of self-monitoring and strategic goal setting, whether it's in business or health, because it helps you stay on track and both provide accountability and a tangible record of your progress. So what I always say is, first of all, think about tracking behaviors. Use a journal, use an app to record what you eat, when you exercise and how you feel. If you will write down not just what you eat or when you exercise, but

what the emotion is that goes with it, you can really reveal patterns in your habits and hold yourself accountable. And there's some great apps like Berrytastic, MyFitnessPal, Loselt, they're worth a look and see and a try. Now, also, I'm all about healthy meals and making meals easy. So I do a lot of cooking and I'll just add this in here because as you start,

looking at what you're recording. And let me just say, some people hate recording, and that is okay. If you don't like to record what you do, it's okay. But then structured meals become super important for you because if you're not recording or and you don't have structured meals, it's easy to just start eating whatever, whenever.

But I use sheet pan dinners, Connie, I don't know if you do, but I'm asked a lot, what can I have for dinner tonight? So I've got a freebie, you can get it. It has I think four, five, six sheet pan recipes. And what that means is everything goes on one sheet pan, like shrimp, all your vegetables, all at one time. And in about 30 minutes, it's ready to go. That's my kind of dinner. So you can find it at [breakingdownnutrition.com slash sheet pan dinners](http://breakingdownnutrition.com/sheet-pan-dinners). I'll put the.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (08:53.579)

That's the way to do it.

Dr Susan Mitchell (09:00.898)

the link in the show notes along with Connie's link and that too. But don't you agree that you have to, if you're not going to record your data, you've got to have some kind of way of setting goals, don't you think?

Connie Stapleton, PhD (09:13.815)

Absolutely, and honestly, tracking is one of the number one researched ways to maintain weight loss. So there is that. But if you don't like to do that, then I agree with Dr. Susan. And the simpler the better. So if you use those sheet pan meals, then you are setting a

Realistic. It's realistic. It's very health focused. It's right in front of your eyes. So you don't have to get fixed on the scale. don't have to make it small. I'm going to use these recipes, you know,

four nights and then I'll have leftovers for the rest. But it could also be let's do 30 minutes of exercising and get eight hours of sleep. Make it specific. Make it realistic. And, you know, one of the things people don't do enough

Dr Susan Mitchell (09:47.063)
Yes.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (10:08.023)
of Dr. Susan is to celebrate non-food rewards. We think we have to celebrate even for our kids. Get them a new book, get them a new game or give yourself a massage or give yourself a 30 minute walk outside. Give yourself something that's positive and motivates you to think in terms of

Dr Susan Mitchell (10:12.972)
Absolutely.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (10:36.375)
healthier habits.

Dr Susan Mitchell (10:37.762)
I so agree. We spend more time shaming ourselves than we do say, at a girl, at a boy.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (10:44.359)
It is absolutely critical and we this this is also very researched and it's if you give yourself rewards you are setting up I can do it mentality and you're clicking the dopamine in the head so get reward rewarding yourself verbally and emotionally.

Dr Susan Mitchell (11:06.132)
So I think that's true. And I also think that you have to have a good supportive environment, especially when on those days you're feeling weak, don't you?

Connie Stapleton, PhD (11:15.927)
That's my number one thing is like we have so little control over so much, we need to take control over our environment, which includes our home, our pantry, our desk drawers.

Dr Susan Mitchell (11:28.546)
And it's so true because if you have &Ms in the drawer at work or in the pantry at home, they're going to call your name, Connie. Connie, I'm here. Connie, come and get me. I'm telling you, I used to see this at the radio station all the time. You'd come in in the morning, somebody would say, hey, they've got cookies on their desk. It's just crazy, right?

Connie Stapleton, PhD (11:50.977)
Terrible, it's everywhere.

Dr Susan Mitchell (11:52.782)
But it does take time and it takes patience to change. So talk a little bit about that self compassion. Yeah.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (12:00.471)
Well, you know, that is tough because it's a world of instant gratification. Change doesn't happen that way. I wish it did, but it doesn't, my friends. And so that's part of that mindset, understanding and accepting that this change into a healthy lifestyle takes patience and you've got to be patient with yourself. So having compassion, which we have in spades for other people, but we lack desperately.

Dr Susan Mitchell (12:06.754)
Yes, for sure.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (12:30.103)
Well, I should be able to, I should. Well, why should you if they don't have to? Give yourself the same compassion you give your friends and make that a habit. Make that a habit because that's how we will get there going, okay, I messed up, onward and forward, not bam, bam, bam.

Dr Susan Mitchell (12:38.198)
Ooh, that's a great, that's great point.

Dr Susan Mitchell (12:47.822)
And you know, I also think that part of being able to do that and be successful is to being compassionate with yourself and giving yourself the time it takes is that you've got to along the way and you're gonna prioritize rest and stress management. Because I'm gonna tell you when I'm tired and I haven't slept well or the office is so busy, I'm thinking I just can't keep up and that stress is there. That increases the production of the hormone.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (13:04.393)
Yeah.

Dr Susan Mitchell (13:15.054)
cortisol, which I know everyone's heard of, which promotes belly fat storage, you know, kind of drives it right in there to the belly. And it promotes cravings. But when you practice stress management techniques like yoga, which I know, Connie, you're a big fan of deep breathing, and you get sleep, sleep is just invaluable in rebooting and resetting your body and helping you to deal with anxiety and stress.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (13:19.831)
Yeah.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (13:44.29)
think that most of us think we don't have time. We don't have time to sleep and we don't have time to rest. But I think also, and I've heard a lot about the younger generation, like the early 20s now, they are understanding because they've been more educated about this and they are focusing on getting more sleep. They are focusing on, I'm not gonna work.

Dr Susan Mitchell (13:57.71)
Mm-hmm.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (14:08.767)
you know, 80 hours a week. I'm not doing it. I think that is a really positive thing. And I think those of us who, you know, are in our fifties and beyond need to go, wait a minute, we need to take a step back. were, it was work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work, work. And so learning that we need to rest our minds and our bodies is such a gift to our health.

Dr Susan Mitchell (14:10.7)
Yeah, yeah.

Dr Susan Mitchell (14:14.614)
I need to.

Dr Susan Mitchell (14:32.706)

And you know, along with that drive that so many of our generation has of just work all the time comes this stinkin' thinking, as I've heard you call it, where we think we have to work 80 hours or we're just not getting it done or we think we have to do this. How do you set yourself free from stinkin' thinking?

Connie Stapleton, PhD (14:42.069)

Yes.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (14:54.037)

Well, that goes back to where we started. It has to come with awareness. I'm aware that I'm thinking negatively about what I just ate. I'm aware that I'm thinking, I'll sleep when I die. I'm aware that I'm thinking, I don't have time to rest. I don't have time to exercise. So being aware and catching those thoughts and go, wait a minute.

Dr Susan Mitchell (15:05.293)

Ha

Connie Stapleton, PhD (15:14.687)

What I'm really after is long time overall health, physical, mental, emotional health. And so if we can interrupt the automatic negative thoughts, that's a big part of cognitive behavioral therapy, and recognize, wait a minute, this thinking is going to lead me farther from my goals. Let's stop, pause, restate.

Dr Susan Mitchell (15:29.582)

Mm-hmm.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (15:41.6)

Maybe talk to a friend and say, a minute. I know I need to rest. Can you talk me into that? I'm not giving myself permission. So we have to catch the negative thinking and replace it with something different.

Dr Susan Mitchell (15:56.438)

So let's reframe you again as something you mentioned a lot. And I think it can be hard to teach yourself because we're in a society in the United States anyway, that says drive yourself, drive yourself, take care of everyone else but you. And we kind of fall into that stinking thinking. How do you, and is it okay to just put into action where you talk to yourself and you say, stop?

in the middle of this stop that's thinking thinking or stop I'm not going to do that I'm going to switch this how do you actually put that kind of into action?

Connie Stapleton, PhD (16:33.303)

The best way that I work myself out of a negative emotional state or a downward spiral or a, you know, is first of all, I let myself have the emotions because they're there. So I give myself a minute to just have my little tantrum internally. And then I do that self-talk. Self-talk is critical. And it's like, really? Do you want to go yell at people? Then they're going to feel bad and you're going to feel bad. Do you want to go eat that?

Dr Susan Mitchell (16:58.157)

Hahaha

Connie Stapleton, PhD (16:59.741)

Do you want to go eat 12 cupcakes? Then I'm going to feel bad and I'm going to feel worse and I'm going to take it out on other people. So to cultivate a more positive mindset, I take a minute.

let myself deal with my emotions, do a few deep breaths, and then I have a conversation with myself that self-talk, reframe myself, take that negative self-talk and say, I'm going to go with something more positive. I have to, I'm going to destroy my day and everybody else's. And I focus on something great that I'm grateful for. It's like, yes, I hate the fact that I'm stuck in this traffic jam right now. And I want to just pull off and go to the Dairy Queen, but I'm grateful.

that I have nothing in my car to turn to that's going to sabotage my health goals. I'm grateful I have a cell phone. I'm going to catch up on a phone call with my best friend. So replace it with some gratitude and then call my friend and say, listen, I'm feeling kind of cranky. So I thought I'm going to call you and we're going to laugh about the time I fell in the lake and went diving for my \$400 glasses, which is a true story.

Dr Susan Mitchell (18:07.886)

You know, this is so usable, Connie. It's not just, sometimes you feel like you hear things over and over and over, but this is something that people can actually, you my listeners can say, I'm going to listen to this over and over and I can do this. I can do this on a daily basis. I can begin to change what I normally do and replace it. Cause I'm just thinking about another tool that goes in hand with stinking thinking and that's self.

praise and I know we just barely mentioned that a minute ago with positive self talk but how is self praise similar or is it the same as positive self talk and is it beneficial and does it power up your confidence to have this self praise? I mean you don't want to start thinking like look at me I'm all that. That's not what I'm talking about.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (18:56.853)

right because that is a self right. Yeah, that's just false. Whatever. yes, they're similar. They're different. So positive self talk is more like, all right.

If I focus on this negative thinking, is it going to lead me to my goals or stray from my goals? If I take the time to change it, and this is, this requires effort all the time. So make little sticky notes, put them in your car, put them on your desk, or put them on your mirror. It requires knowing what to do in the moment. We can't always think, but positive self-praise is very different. And like you said, it's not the braggadocious. It's the, you know what?

I made a healthy choice today instead of turning to food. I feel so good about that. And the repercussions of that are amazing because it does give you, know what I did it once, I bet I can do it again. So it does motivate you. It increases that word that I love, self-efficacy, the belief that I can do it again. And it makes you feel better and feeling better.

gives you that dopamine hit and it motivates you to do it again. So the small tiny praises are so worth your while. You don't have to go broadcast them just in here. High five yourself.

Dr Susan Mitchell (20:16.302)

And I think it's hard for most of us. We were never taught to praise ourselves, I guess. It seems like for some reason, negative thoughts roll off the tongue so much more easily.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (20:33.107)

It is absolutely true. And here's the deal. That's why I said it takes effort. It really does. But you know, I think we're so programmed in our stupidly paced society and our perfectionist and all

that stuff. We got to reverse this pattern. You know, I'm reading an impressive book called The Myth of Normal. Our society is

not healthy and normal in these regards. So if we do praise ourself, if we do give ourself compassion, if we do look for the gratitude, our stress and negativity decrease so much. Do know what that makes us? A happier person and a whole lot nicer to be around. You know? It does. It's just like I can focus on the traffic and the people at the work and I can go, or I can focus on, thank God I have a job that I hate.

Dr Susan Mitchell (20:59.47)
Correct.

Dr Susan Mitchell (21:14.062)
and healthier.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (21:25.643)
because I can feed my family. know, finding some gratitude. A lot of people are telling me they feel stuck in their job. I'm like, you can look at it as you're stuck in your job or you can look at it as in this society where people are being laid off right and left. I am choosing to stay put in this job because it provides me with what I need. It's a big change. And then you can go into gratitude, which helps so much.

Dr Susan Mitchell (21:29.698)
Yeah, absolutely.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (21:55.33)
Focus on that self-concept. Talk positively to yourself. Talk positively about yourself in front of your children and set the example for others. Be the positive person in the negative environment. People are going to be like, I want someone what she's got.

Dr Susan Mitchell (22:13.622)
Yeah, and they remember it too. They really remember how you come across. So, okay, get specific and just give us a few. This is exactly how to practice self praise.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (22:15.999)
Absolutely.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (22:26.611)
Absolutely. So already today it's like, my gosh, I made my bed. I got that done. I feel really happy about that. I like a clean environment. Makes me feel more organized. my goodness. I got those 20 minutes or that 20 grams of protein in two hours before after I got up. I feel really good about that. my gosh, I've already drank two bottles of water. That is amazing. I am really doing a good job. I am on track.

Those are the things, it's just the ordinary things. It doesn't have to be just won the Nobel Peace Prize. If you drank your water, if you took your bariatric vitamins, if you got that 20 grams of protein in in two hours of being up or whatever your dietitian has told you, that is praise worthy. People are like, I should praise myself for taking a vitamin. Yes, you should. Yes, you should. Everything we do to enhance our health and wellbeing, praise yourself.

Dr Susan Mitchell (23:02.094)
Yeah.

Ha

Dr Susan Mitchell (23:24.898)

I agree. It's not about bragging. It's just about that internal sense of satisfaction. So as yeah.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (23:28.631)

Yes! I want to feel good about me!

Dr Susan Mitchell (23:35.608)

So as we wrap up, Connie, what mental tool have we missed that you feel is super important to know?

Connie Stapleton, PhD (23:44.353)

Support, support. Because there are times when as much as I want to get out of my grumpy, I need to call my best friend and say, I'm grumpy, kick me in the rear. Remind me, right? Remind me. Let's laugh together. Remind me of the 10 billion things I have to be grateful for. So having the support when we're struggling to pull ourselves out of where we need to be.

Dr Susan Mitchell (23:57.678)

Yeah. Yeah.

Dr Susan Mitchell (24:12.248)

Such great information, always realistic, always usable today in our lives. Thank you for sharing your valuable time with us.

Connie Stapleton, PhD (24:21.992)

I love being with you.

Dr Susan Mitchell (24:23.96)

Here's what I want you to do this week. So if you're struggling with weight loss and keeping your weight off, take a hard look at these mental tools. Are you using any of these tools that Dr. Connie and I have discussed? If not, think about which ones can you put into place right now today? Don't let it slide. You are worth it.