

Oneirotherapy in Overweight and Obesity

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Abstract

Oneirotherapy is a form of psychotherapy that is based on visual imagery and symbolism. In this communication. We discuss the role of oneirotherapy, or using vivid imagery, as adjuvant therapy in obesity care. Oneirotherapy can be used to promote acceptance of, and adherence to, prescribed therapy. It may also help improve quality of life and enhance self-esteem. However, oneirotherapy alone, without following a healthy lifestyle and or taking anti-obesity medication, will help manage weight only in one's dreams

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Dreams

Dreams are a physiological phenomenon that occur during sleep. They include images, ideas, emotions and sensations that present involuntarily in succession. Various theories have been proposed to explain the function of dreams. Dreams have been thought to promote learning, help in clearing the mind of unwanted information, serve a quasi-therapeutic function by processing trauma, and by practicing how to deal with threats, and keep the occipital lobe busy during period of prolonged sleep.¹

Oneirotherapy

Dream interpretation or the study of dreams, also known as oneirology, has been practiced since ancient times. Oneirotherapy, i.e., using dreaming as a therapeutic measure, is a relatively recent addition to psychotherapy.²

Oneirotherapy has been defined a form of psychotherapy that relies on visual imagery and symbolism. Virel and Fretigny, describe it as a holistic treatment based on mental imagination.³ Much and Sheikh use the term to classify therapeutic imagery techniques.⁴

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Obesity

Oneirotherapy has been used in the management of psychological and psychiatric disease. Obesity, too, has been labeled as "a disease of the mind." While this approach may be too simplistic, there is no denying the fact that obesity is a perfect platform for mind-body medicine. The Ominous Octet of obesity⁵ does not mention emotional aspects of obesity pathophysiology, but it is known that mental health and sleep hygiene do contribute⁶ directly and indirectly, to the endocrine and metabolic issues listed in the Octet.

Oneirotherapy in Obesity

Oneirotherapy, therefore, may be tried as an adjuvant therapy in persons with obesity. Though formal psychotherapy should be delivered only by qualified mental health professionals, suggestions for "oneiromodulation" can be shared as a part of routine obesity care.

The person living with obesity can be encouraged to 'dream', day dream or visualize himself or herself in the ideal body weight. This visual imagery can serve as a motivational tool to enhance specific suggestions include

"Picturise yourself wearing your favourite sized dress. How do you feel? What would you do to achieve this goal?"

"Imagine yourself dancing or moving as effortlessly as you would like to. What effort would be worth this aim?"

Such ideation is used for vivid visual imagery during the daytime. However, it can influence one's dreams as well, and can enhance one's motivation and determination to practice and persist with a healthy weight-optimising lifestyle.

In a Nut-Shell

Dreams, of course, must be accompanied by action. Oneirotherapy alone does not reduce weight. At best, it is an adjuvant therapy that can improve one's quality of life and increase adherence to therapy. At the least, oneirotherapy of obesity is a candidate fit for further study and research, and not just our dreams.

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