

Evidence Summary

Independent Research Validation — Leeds Beckett University

The Eating Freely programme has been independently evaluated by researchers at Leeds Beckett University through a three-phase programme of work: a lived experience consultation (PPIE), a systematic review and meta-analysis published in a peer-reviewed journal, and a feasibility pilot study. Together, these three phases establish a robust evidence base for the programme's clinical effectiveness and acceptability — and directly inform the design of the current NHS multi-site pilot.

47 Studies in systematic review	~7,000 Participants in evidence base	27.7% Reduction in emotional eating	4.2 kg Average weight loss
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Research Phase 1

Phase 1 — Patient & Public Involvement (PPIE)

Researchers recruited six adults with lived experience of obesity and emotional eating through Obesity UK. Participants attended four structured online meetings between September and November 2023, providing qualitative insights into their experience of current weight management services and their preferences for psychological support.

Key findings:

- A consistent and significant gap in psychological support was identified across all tiers of weight management services, including post-bariatric surgery.
- Participants described emotional eating as functioning like addiction — rarely acknowledged or addressed clinically.
- Strong consensus that services should address the *reasons* behind eating behaviours, not just dietary content or weight targets.
- Peer support, self-compassion, and trauma-informed approaches were identified as highly desirable.

"I know what's good to eat and what's not good. The problem is in my head. I'd like to see obesity or disordered eating given the same gravity as bulimia or anorexia."

— PPIE Participant, Obesity UK

Research Phase 2

Phase 2 — Systematic Review & Meta-Analysis

Published: *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, 2025

This is the first systematic review to calculate the impact of specific behaviour change techniques (BCTs) on emotional eating outcomes. The review examined 47 studies with approximately 7,000 participants (mean age 45 years).

1	Incompatible beliefs	Values-identity dissonance to motivate change
2	Pros/cons of change vs. staying the same	Non-coercive values exploration
3	Goal setting	Person-centred, values-aligned targets
4	Review of outcome goals	Progress reflection and self-efficacy
5	Feedback on behaviour	Clinician reinforcement and support

These BCTs were associated with **5.4–8.4 kg weight loss** and an emotional eating reduction with a Standardised Mean Difference **>1.0** (high effect; threshold = 0.8). **All five BCTs are integrated into the Eating Freely programme.**

Research Phase 3

Phase 3 — Eating Freely Feasibility Pilot Study

A mixed-methods feasibility study of the Eating Freely programme as an online group intervention. 16 weekly sessions over 4.5 months, delivered by a researcher trained in the Eating Freely method and supervised by a psychologist.

Expressed interest	19
Confirmed eligibility	14
Enrolled (programme start)	10
Completers	8 (7 women, 1 man)

Attrition note: Attrition occurred primarily *before* the programme began — consistent with feasibility studies of this kind. The lead researcher noted that future scaled trials would need to over-recruit to allow for natural attrition. This learning directly informed the minimum cohort requirement of **15 participants per site** in the current NHS multi-site pilot.

Attendance among completers: Average 13.75 of 16 sessions — **86% attendance rate.**

Emotional eating score (0–100)	72.7	45.0	–27.7%
Uncontrolled eating score (0–100)	59.3	32.0	–27.3 pts
Average weight loss (with no focus on weight loss)	—	—	4.2 kg

Improvements in emotional eating and uncontrolled eating **continued beyond the end of the programme** at one-month follow-up — indicating sustained, not just temporary, behaviour change. Weight loss occurred with **no weight loss focus or pressure.**

Participant voices:

"Honestly, 100% I haven't binged for weeks because I'm thinking more, I'm thinking about what it does to me and what value I have from that binge. So 100% it's been amazing for me."

"I would say a 75% drop in binge eating. The key messages from the programme have definitely helped with that."

"Before Eating Freely it would absolutely have been at 100% for emotional eating. Now I wouldn't even say it's 15/20%."

"I've lost weight because I've not been binge eating, but the good thing is the losing of the weight has come as a byproduct of the not bingeing. It's not been any conscious effort to lose weight."

Phase 4 — In Progress

Phase 4 — NHS Multi-Site Pilot (2025)

Building directly on the feasibility findings, the current NHS multi-site pilot is designed to generate a larger, statistically robust dataset across multiple NHS community weight management sites, with a consistent service evaluation framework embedded at each site.

Sites	4–5 NHS community weight management teams
Minimum cohort per site	15 enrolled patients
Duration	6 months
Evaluation framework	Consistent validated measures across all sites

Publication potential

Multi-site data suitable for peer-reviewed submission

The minimum cohort of 15 enrolled patients per site has been set specifically to account for natural attrition and ensure a statistically meaningful completer dataset — a direct methodological learning from the Phase 3 feasibility study. One NHS site is already confirmed; three to four further sites are being recruited.

About Eating Freely

Eating Freely is a specialist psychological programme for adults living with emotional eating and binge eating, developed over 12 years of clinical practice by psychotherapist Emma Murphy. The programme integrates evidence-based behaviour change techniques — including ACT, CBT, mindfulness, self-compassion, and neuroscience — within a trauma-informed, weight-inclusive framework. It is fully aligned with NICE and WHO guidelines for psychological support in weight management.

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