

DO DIETS WORK?

YES...

Short term weight loss often happens when we restrict our calorie intake through dieting

... and ...

NO

People are **RARELY** able to maintain this weight loss long term and weight regain is common as well as many other negative side effects.

DIET-CULTURE

What is it?

- Diet culture is a set of beliefs that **worships thinness** and **fears fatness**.
- Thinness is seen as more desirable than fatness. Thin bodies are seen as being successful, happy and healthy; and fat bodies are seen as being lazy, undesirable and unhealthy.
- Diet culture promotes **unrealistic and unhealthy body ideals** for the majority of people.
- This can be very harmful for those who don't fit these body types as it impacts self-esteem and promotes **weight loss**.
- Diet culture places the **blame** on the individual who is not able to lose weight, and does not acknowledge that **there are many other factors that determine weight**.



image from @mysignaturenutrition instagram

MYTHS ABOUT FATNESS

Many common beliefs about fatness are myths that are not built on sound science. However, because these myths have been repeated so often, they're seen as facts. Debunking fatness myths can help us to look at these fears of fatness in a new light and support us in finding our own paths to wellness.

Myth 1: Fatness leads to shorter life spans

Reality: Research shows that “overweight” people can live longer than “normal weight” people; and “obese” people can live just as long as those of “normal weight”.

Myth 2: Fatness plays a large role in disease

Reality: Though there are higher rates of many diseases in heavier people, this does NOT mean that fatness causes this. There are other factors and traits that differ between lighter and heavier weight people, that are not because of fat. An example is fitness. Unfit thin people may have up to twice as high death rates than people who are "obese" and fit.

Myth 3: Weight loss improves health

Health improvements can happen to anyone at ANY size. People usually change other habits like exercise and diet when they experience weight loss. Pursing weight loss alone harms health and can increase mortality rate and lead to weight loss/regain cycles.



DIETING DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK.... WHY MIGHT THAT BE?

CALORIES IN DO NOT ALWAYS EQUAL CALORIES OUT

Calories is a word for energy. We need energy to live. How much energy (AKA calories) we absorb from our food varies from person to person. This means that two people could both eat 100 calories of pizza, and one person absorbs 95 calories whereas the other absorbs 80 calories. Some of the reasons for this include:

- **Gut bacteria** can digest some of the food we eat instead of being absorbed. Dieting can change our gut bacteria, increasing how much energy is absorbed from food (causing weight regain).
- **Genes, hormones and neurotransmitters** can cause body reactions that turn food energy into heat that leaves the body.
- **Body reactions** can turn food energy into fat stores OR make our bodies more efficient at burning fat OR building muscle during exercise.
- **Medications and disease states** can cause weight changes.
- **Emotions** about food can cause stress and gut problems that impact metabolism.
- **Environmental toxins** like plastics can mess with the endocrine system and increase fat storage.

OUR BODIES ON DIETS

When starting a calorie restricting diet, we will likely lose weight initially because our body stores will be burned for energy.

BUT **longer term** calories restriction causes our bodies to go into **survival mode** to save all possible energy. Survival mode can cause:

- Our **metabolism to slow** so we burn less calories.
- Our **hunger signals and appetite to increase** so a larger range of foods are more appealing. If we restrict for long enough, our body can turn off our hunger signals because this wastes valuable energy.
- Our **eating habits can change** because we become more tired and less energetic than if we were more well nourished.
- **Troubled relationship with food, lower self-esteem, self-hatred.**
- Repeated cycles of weight loss and gain can cause **inflammation** which increases the risk for many diseases like heart disease and diabetes.
- Our **set point increases.**

TIPS FOR UNLEARNING DIETING

SET POINT

Much of our body's weight regulation is beyond our mind's control. This is **good** because our bodies want to keep us alive and will maintain a stable weight if we let them. Your **set point is the weight range that is optimal for YOUR body**. It is usually between 10-15 pounds. Your body will work hard to keep you in that range. For some people, their set point is in the "normal weight" range and for others it is in the "overweight" or "obese" weight ranges - just like how we are all different heights.

Your set point is:

- The weight you naturally maintain when **eating to appetite**, and tune into your hunger signals.
- The weight you naturally maintain when you **don't focus on weight or food habits**.
- The weight you **return to** in between diets.
- Determined by your **biology/genes, biography and current circumstances**.

There is a good chance that if you feel the need to control your weight by watching calories, you may be above your set point, not below. Going above our set point is more flexible than going below, where our bodies kick into that survival mode.

Fighting our set points is a losing battle. We have little control over this weight range. It's much easier to **begin to live at peace** with your body, and find ways to listen to your appetite, enjoy activity and food.

START LISTENING TO YOUR BODY

Your body has the greatest **wisdom**, and **you are your own expert**. You don't need to count calories to know how many calories works best for your body. Pay attention to how food influences your physical and mental well being; this will guide you to choosing foods that are more nutritious and work **best for YOU**.

- Ask yourself:
 - Do you have more energy after eating a small amount of carbs vs a large amount?
 - Do you feel full longer when you pair a carb with a protein/fat? (e.g. apple & peanut butter)
 - What foods may make you feel bloated? Do you feel better having smaller amounts at a time?

No foods are off limits. Food can stop holding so much power over us because we know we can have whatever we feel like, whenever we feel like it. Eating something that is allowed is not as tempting as eating something off limits. This also helps to **reduce guilt** around food. Eat plenty of **variety** and you'll get the nutrients you need.

EMOTIONAL EATING

Food can **help us manage our emotions** like anger, sadness or boredom, and helps us feel temporarily more stable. This is normal and completely fine. Concern comes when food is our **ONLY** coping mechanism; especially if it is followed by guilt due to diet mentality and weight fears. The “problem” isn’t that you’re over eating – it’s that you don’t yet have other ways to cope with emotions.

The drive to eat when we aren’t physically hungry means **we need something**. Acknowledging that you are an emotional eater can be a great place to start – as this has played an important role in your self-care and was the best way to deal with emotions that you knew at that time.

When you feel the urge to eat, pause and ask yourself. **Am I physically hungry?**

- If no – then ask: **What am I feeling? What do I need?**
 - Maybe you need a hug, to call a loved one, go for a walk or take a nap
- If yes - then **eat!**

Listening to our bodies, being compassionate with ourselves and accepting our size isn’t a straightforward journey. **Be gentle** with yourself - change takes time!

OTHER FACTORS

- **Move** for the **FUN** of it. Exercise doesn’t have to be vigorous or continuous - we can add activity into our every day lives. Here are some ideas:
 - Go for a walk with a friend, join a class or team, clean the house, take the stairs, start gardening, park farther away, stand/stretch or move every hour as a break, hold walking meetings, play a childhood game (like tag or hide n seek), try yoga.
- Try to get enough **sleep**.
- Check in with your **stress** levels. Relaxation is important! Breathing techniques, meditation and talking about our feelings can help.
- **Social media cleanse:** Begin to notice what social media accounts may be bringing down your self-esteem. You have the power to unfollow anything that doesn't make you feel good! Look for accounts that have more positive messages, especially around body image.
- **Wardrobe cleanse:** Clothes should fit you –not the other way around! Dress how you want. Wear clothes that make you feel good. Do your make up (or don't) because YOU want to - not because you feel pressured to be a certain beauty standard.

REFERENCES

- Barrya et al (2014). Fitness vs fatness on all-cause mortality: A meta-analysis. *Progress in Cardiovascular Disease*. Vol 56. iss. 4, pp 382-9
- Bacon, L & Aphramor, L. (2014). *Body Respect: What conventional health books get wrong, leave out and just plain fail to understand about weight*
- Hardley, R. (2019). The many problems with BMI – AKA the BS measuring index. Accessed by :<https://www.rachaelhartleynutrition.com/blog/problems-with-bmi>
- Harrison, C. (2018). What is diet culture? Accessed by: <https://christyharrison.com/blog/what-is-diet-culture>
- Keys, A.; Brožek, J.; Henschel, A.; Mickelsen, O.; Taylor, H. L. Oxford, England: Univ. of Minnesota Press *The biology of human starvation*. (2 vols).(1950). xxxii 1385 pp.
- Muenning et al (2008) I think therefore I am: Perceived ideal weight as determinant of health. *American Journal of Public Health*. Vol 96, Iss 9. pp 1662-68.
- Puhl, R., Andreyeva, T. & Brownell, K. (2009). Perceptions of weight discrimination: Prevalence and comparison to race and gender discrimination in America. *International Journal of Obesity*. Vol 32, Iss 6, pp. 992-1000.