

Body Weight Basics

Are you sick of feeling unhappy about your weight? Have you lost track of the number of diets you've tried, but that haven't worked? Are you tired of worrying about how to lose that last 10 pounds?

It's time to try a new way of thinking about your weight!

For many years, body fat has been seen as "bad". It is assumed that everyone can be thin. If a person is not thin, there must be something wrong with them. Fatness is seen something to be fixed, regardless of the cost. People who are fat are often stigmatized as being lazy and weak, with no willpower to control their eating.

In our society, the "cure" for fatness has often been to follow a strict diet or exercise plan until an "ideal" weight is reached. Success is defined by the amount of weight that is lost. The key word in this way of thinking is "control".

But, this view of body weight does not seem to reflect reality. Over the past few years, the population has been getting larger, not thinner, even though almost 25% of Canadians are dieting. In most cases, the weight lost while on a diet is regained within a year. Apparently, being thin is not as easy, or as "normal", as we have been led to believe.

In contrast, the new way of looking at weight recognizes that people come in many different shapes and sizes. It accepts that people are large for a variety of reasons, including because they are genetically programmed to be so. It is not possible for all people to be thin.

While it is true that excess body fat can increase the risk of disease such as heart disease and some cancers, it does not mean that being fat is unhealthy. Good health is possible at any body size.

The new way of thinking encourages people to accept and understand their bodies. Instead of strict diet and exercise plans designed to cause weight loss, the focus is on learning information and skills that help people to feel better and to improve the quality of their lives. People are invited to look at all their options and to set their goals based on what is right for them. They are taught to get in touch with their internal signals of hunger and fullness and to balance healthy eating with enjoyable physical activity. The key word in the new way of thinking is "trust".

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How can you "tune into" this new way of thinking about your weight?

Be realistic about your body. Recognize that your body size is, to some extent, dependent on your genes. It is part of your family heritage! Take a close look at your extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) to see what body shapes and sizes are realistic for you.

Be good to yourself. Learn to accept yourself for who you are. View yourself from many perspectives. Emphasize your strengths and beauties and be objective about your weaknesses and limitations. Celebrate the unique body and self that is you!

Challenge the current values of our society. Accept all body sizes as good. Don't be fooled by the media myth that only thin people can be happy, successful and fulfilled. Look for and create role models that are a better reflection of reality.

Change your viewpoint. Instead of asking "How can I get thin?" ask yourself "What can I do to be healthier and happier?" Your weight is not necessarily something you can change. The way you live your life is.

Choose your own path or direction. Don't let others tell you what you need to do to make your life better. Explore your options and make the choices that are right for you.

Get in touch with your body. Learn to recognize your internal signals of hunger and fullness. Listen to your body when it says "I need more" or "I've had enough". Work with your body, not against it, to maintain a balance between the amount of food you eat and the amount of energy you use.

Eat for the right reasons. Learn to identify when you are eating to meet emotional needs or environmental or social pressures instead of physical hunger. Find more appropriate and satisfying ways to meet these needs and to respond to these pressures.

Make good food choices. Choose foods that will nourish you and make you healthy and strong, not foods that **might** help you lose weight. Recognize that foods are not "good" or "bad". Any food can fit into a healthy eating style if eaten in moderation and as one of a wide variety of foods.

Get active. Find forms of physical activity that you can do and that you enjoy. Forget all the rules and the "shoulds" about exercise and have fun! Try a variety of different activities until you find the ones that really "move" you.