

Ditch the Diets and Embrace Health at Every Size®!

In a society where it is impossible to walk past diet products and magazines at the grocery store or log onto social media without being reminded of the significance placed on weight loss, two things are clear: weight is a matter of choice and a thin body equals good health (with larger bodies being unhealthy). But are these beliefs backed by the evidence? There are a few reasons why we need to challenge these assumptions:

- **Weight loss is rarely possible long term.** While studies show that people can lose weight for 6-12 months, around 95% will regain all, if not more, of the weight they lost by the two to five year mark.¹
- **Bodies fight to stay within an individualized weight range.** A part of your brain called the hypothalamus maintains your “set point” body weight by adjusting your metabolism, hormones that affect hunger and fullness, and your energy level.² This set point is the weight you maintain when you don’t fixate on your weight or eating. It might not coincide with the “normal” body mass index (BMI) range. All bodies are different!
- **Research on weight and mortality** by the CDC found the lowest risk of death amongst people in the “overweight” BMI category.³ Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) III showed that healthy behaviors are more important than weight. People in the “obese” weight range didn’t have a higher risk of death than those in the “normal” weight range if they had four healthy behaviors (5+ servings of fruit/veggies daily, >12 leisure time physical activities monthly, no smoking, and alcohol use within moderation).⁴
- **A focus on weight increases weight stigma** (discrimination/stereotyping based on weight) **and weight cycling** (yo-yo dieting). Weight stigma and



Source: bodyliberationphotos.com

the chronic stress it causes are associated with increased blood pressure, chronic inflammation, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, and disordered eating.⁵ Dieting often leads to weight cycling, which also contributes to increased disease risk and poor physical and mental health outcomes.⁵

- **Dieting increases the risk of disordered eating habits and diagnosable eating disorders.** According to the National Eating Disorders Association, 35% of “normal dieters” progress to pathological dieting and 20-25% of those people develop eating disorders.⁶

What if there was another way? The Health At Every Size® movement provides an alternative that can help you give up the battle with your body and nurture a healthy relationship with food!

What is Health at Every Size® (HAES®)?

HAES® is an evidence-based approach that supports individuals of all body shapes and sizes in pursuing health without a focus on weight. It is also a social justice movement seeking to redefine health, promote size acceptance, challenge the cultural obsession with thinness and weight loss, and work to make the world (including the doctor’s office) a safer and more accepting place where people of all sizes have access to quality healthcare. The HAES® principles are weight inclusivity, health enhancement, eating for well-being, respectful care, and life-enhancing movement.⁷



Source: bodyliberationphotos.com

The HAES® approach has been gaining traction in the field of nutrition and dietetics as well as eating disorder treatment and has a growing research base. HAES® research shows improvements in cardiometabolic health, eating behaviors, quality of life, and psychological well-being.⁸ The study participants in the HAES® groups have higher retention rates, with the weight loss groups having a much higher attrition rates, showing that the weight-neutral programs are more sustainable.

Misconceptions about HAES®

- It is not saying that everyone can be healthy at any size, but that improving one's well-being is accessible to all by using strategies outside of weight control.
- It does not encourage “unhealthy” body sizes – most people do not take care of something they hate, so increasing body acceptance actually serves to improve self-care habits.
- It is not opposed to weight changes or desiring weight loss -- it is neutral to weight changes (up or down!) and respects each person's right to choose what they feel is right for them.
- It is not anti-science; it is critical of conclusions from weight loss studies and challenges people to evaluate research methods, confounding factors, etc to gain a better understanding of the science.

How can I start to make peace with food and my body today?

- **Accept your body size and shape.** Avoid comparing your body to those of your friends or celebrities. Curate your social media feed. Take a neutral view of your body. Appreciate your non-image/body qualities.
- **Trust yourself – learn to eat intuitively.** Reconnect with your innate knowledge of how to nourish yourself. Honor signals of hunger, fullness, and appetite. Fully enjoy the pleasure that comes from eating. There is room for all foods within a healthy diet and lifestyle!
- **Embrace a lifestyle that supports your well-being.** Develop and nurture relationships with others and tend to your emotional needs. Find joy in moving your body.
- **Recognize size diversity.** Humans come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and all have the right to pursue (or not pursue) health if they choose to. Appreciate the beauty found amongst diverse bodies and remember that health exists across the size spectrum.
- **Combat weight stigma.** Avoid berating your own body around your family members and friends. Stop

complimenting weight loss or slimness – you could be praising unhealthy behaviors, a physical illness, or a mental health issue. Instead, compliment non-appearance qualities. Model a flexible, intuitive relationship with food and movement.



Source: <https://www.ideafit.com/personal-training/embracing-health-at-every-size/>

Want to learn more? Work with a HAES®-aligned dietitian or check out these resources:

Books:

Intuitive Eating, 4th Ed.. E Resch & E Tribole, 2020.
Anti-Diet. C Harrison, 2019.
Body Respect. L Bacon & L Aphramor, 2014.
More Than a Body. L Kite & L Kite, 2021.
The Body is Not an Apology. SR Taylor, 2021.

Podcasts:

Food Heaven. J Jones, W Lopez
What the Actual Fork. S Preville, J Werner.
Maintenance Phase. A Gordon, M Hobbes.
The Body Grievors Club. B Campos.

References:

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3. Flegal, KM, Graubard, BI, Williamson, DF, Gail, MF. Cause-specific excess deaths associated with underweight, overweight, and obesity. *JAMA*. 2017;298(17), 2028-3037.
4. Matheson EM, King DE, Everett CJ. Healthy lifestyle habits and mortality in overweight and obese individuals. *J Am Board Fam Med*. 2012;25(1):9-15.
5. Tylka TL, Annunziato RA, Burgard D, Daniélsdóttir S, Shuman E, Davis C, et al. The weight-inclusive versus weight-normative approach to health: evaluating the evidence for prioritizing well-being over weight loss. *J Obes*. 2014;983495.
6. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/sites/default/files/ResourceHandouts/GeneralStatistics.pdf>
7. <https://asdah.org/health-at-every-size-haes-approach/>
8. Schaefer JT, Magnuson AB. A review of interventions that promote eating by internal cues. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2014;114(5):734-60.

Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).