

JANUARY:

WHAT'S A HEALTHY WEIGHT FOR ME???

For the New Year, some of us have made a resolution to lose weight... just as we have many times in the past...

It's easy to find weight-loss products and self-help books that strike fear as they describe the "obesity crisis" in America, a 'land of plenty' for most of its citizens. We've all heard the quips "Thin is in!" and "Some of us eat to live, others live to eat..."

While true obesity (defined as a BMI* of 30 or more) is not healthy, let's examine the issues surrounding weight problems, eating disorders, size prejudice, body image and self-esteem disorders.

WHAT IS NORMAL EATING?

Normal eating means having a healthy relationship with food - Recognize it for what it is! - it provides us with the nourishment for growth and development, and the energy for activity. Normal eating refers to eating *behavior* – *how* a person eats, not *what*. (Often, discussions about food and eating focus on *what* we eat, yet *how* we eat is ignored, even though it is often the root of many eating disorders and weight problems – both over- and under-weight.) Normalizing our eating activities can improve life for the chronic dieter or disordered eater, and help them regain health and satisfaction with their lives. Normal eating includes

- a healthy relationship with food - natural and flexible
- eating at regular times, typically three meals and one or two light snacks each day
- the amount eaten being regulated by inner signals – eating when hungry and stopping when full and satisfied (eating slowly allows us to recognize and respond to the "full" signal *before* we've eaten too much)
- food selection based on balance, variety and moderation

HOW IS DYSFUNCTIONAL EATING DIFFERENT?

- Dysfunctional (disordered) eating may be chaotic – dieting, fasting, binge-eating, purging, skipping meals – or it can mean over-eating or under-eating much more or less than the body wants or needs
- Eating disorders result in a person eating less for nourishment, and more for purposes of relieving stress or anxiety (e.g., to re-shape the body, or for thinness)
- Dysfunctional eating often causes distress itself: instead of feeling better, the person with an eating disorder feels guilty, ashamed, uncomfortably full, or unsatisfied and fearful of bingeing
- When food is restricted, thoughts of food, eating, hunger and weight often dominate one's thoughts
- If food is unsatisfying and may be restricted by the person, they often feel tired, irritable, unable to concentrate, and become obsessed with food and their body image.

Healthy bodies come in all shapes, sizes and colors!

"We need to stop hounding people about their weight and encourage them to eat a healthful diet, and exercise!"

Steven Blair, PhD, Senior Scientific Editor, Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health

COMBATting MISINFORMATION

The "war on obesity" has resulted in exaggeration of the health risks of being overweight: Katherine M. Flegal, PhD, Senior Research Scientist at the National Center for Health Statistics at CDC explains, "Although people think there's there a high mortality associated with overweight, in fact the literature doesn't show it!" Her research, analyzing 30 years of actual death records in the USA showed instead that being clinically "overweight" is associated with a *lower death rate than so-called normal or healthy weight!*

How is this possible? –

- Dieting causes short-term weight loss, often followed by regaining the weight – this is known as weight cycling, which carries its own risks and can lead to preoccupation with food and eating disorders
- drugs offer only minimal weight loss, usually regained when the drug is stopped; taking weight loss drugs long term comes with associated risks; remember that of the 6 million Americans treated with fen-phen (Redux®) one-third of them developed leaky heart valves, and some died of heart and pulmonary disease linked directly to the drug
- gastric surgery for weight loss carries risk of nearly 5% death rate (nearly 50% for patients 75 years and older) (*JAMA, 2005: 1903-1908*)



HEALTHY LIVING... AT ANY SIZE!

A healthy lifestyle is achievable by everyone, unlike so-called "ideal weight". So, focus on the following points:

- accept and respect your own and others' unique traits and talents – celebrate diversity!
- enjoy physical activity every day, your own way, as natural and beneficial.
- enjoy eating well without dieting; rediscover normal eating - 'tune in' to signals of hunger, appetite, fullness.
- enjoy balanced nutrition: honor variety – all foods can 'fit' into the picture, even if only occasionally and in small quantities.
- focus on wellness in body, mind and spirit: make your goal overall health and well-being.
- seek supportive relationships and good communication with family, friends and within communities – praise and support each other – more rewarding than a Dove bar!

www.healthyweightnetwork.com/living.htm

"Underage and Overweight: Our Childhood Obesity Crisis – What Every Family Needs to Know" (2008) by Francie M. Berg

* www.consumer.gov/weightloss/bmi.htm

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