

Science and Politics of Obesity

Seminar, Society for Nutrition Education
July 19, 2006

Health at Every Size:
Strategies to support healthy lifestyles

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Organized by SNE's Weight Realities Division

The War on Obesity

A national campaign of fear mongering

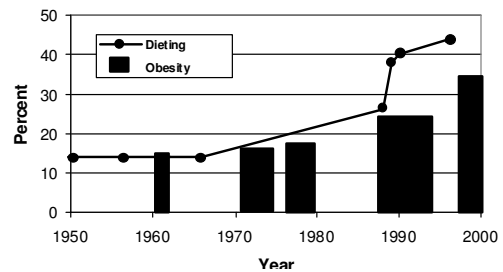
"When you look at obesity, what I call the terror within, a threat that is every bit as real to America as the weapons of mass destruction..."

Richard Carmona, Surgeon General
CNN.com, 3/2/03, Surgeon general to cops: Put down the donuts.

War on obesity *unjustified*

- Weight has been exaggerated as a health risk.
- Weight loss does not necessarily improve health or longevity.
- No method has been documented to result in maintained weight loss.
- Health improvements can occur (in people of all sizes) independent of weight loss.

We're losing the war anyway!



Bacon et al, International Journal of Obesity; 2002: 26:854



The New Peace Movement



Health At Every Size

Health at Every Size

Focus on approaches that can produce health benefits and well-being directly (independent of weight loss)

Weight loss may - or may not - be a side effect of improved health behaviors.

Outcome	Diet		HAES	
	1 year	2 year	1 year	2 year
Weight	Lost (-5 kg)	No change (regained)	No change	No change
Health Improvements	Many	None Sustained	Many	total cholesterol, LDL, blood pressure, depression, self-esteem
Health habit Improvements		None		activity, disordered eating
Health Decrement	None	Self-esteem; Felt "like failures"	None	None
Attrition	42%		8%	

Bacon et al, Journal of the American Dietetic Association; 2005: 105:929

The HAES protocol

The following slides describe the HAES intervention used in the study and make suggestions for implementation.

Overall Premise:

- Encourage healthy lifestyles, as opposed to weight loss.
- Help people improve the quality of their lives by valuing themselves (and their bodies, regardless of size).

Challenging bias

- Implementing HAES requires challenging commonly-held beliefs and deep introspection regarding personal and cultural prejudices and struggles regarding weight and eating.
- Research shows health care practitioners specializing in weight concern hold strong discriminatory biases!

Schwartz et al, Obesity Research; 2003: 11:1033

Health at Every Size

- Self-acceptance
 - Affirm beauty and worth regardless of size or shape
- Physical Activity
 - Increase activity for pleasure and improved quality of life
- Normalized eating
 - Internally directed eating, honoring pleasure and appetite

Self-Acceptance: Background

- Change occurs when individuals value themselves enough to want an improved life.
- Accepting weight is about taking control, not about giving up.
- This gives people the power to go on with their lives and make more positive choices.

Self-Acceptance: Education

- Support clients in re-defining beauty
 - Definitions of beauty are culturally learned
 - We are all taught to hate fat and to hate our bodies
 - These attitudes can be un-learned as well
- Educate clients
 - People can be healthy regardless of size
 - Health improvements are not predicated on weight loss
 - Weight loss attempts have low success (often backfire) and pose dangers

Becoming size-friendly

- Learn to appreciate size diversity (and not just accept or tolerate it)
- Be a role model in attitude and language
 - Train all staff members
- Use positive promotion tools
 - don't promote weight loss
 - have special outreach efforts to larger people
- Post artwork that reflects size diversity
- Have seating areas and equipment that accommodate larger people
- Make only respectful magazines/literature available

Exercise: Old Model

- Regimented (time, duration, intensity)
WORK-out for weight control
- Valued predominately because it helps burn energy (takes the pleasure out)
Isn't sustained
- When weight loss (and sometimes even disease prevention) is the goal, exercise is an act of self-criticism

Activity: New Model

- Find the pleasure in movement
- To gain benefits for health/well-being:
 - Doesn't have to be vigorous
 - Doesn't have to be continuous
- Help clients find a more vital way of being in their bodies and fun activities that are part of their everyday lives
Sustainable!
- When pleasure and vitality are considered, being active is an act of self-nurturance

Normalized Eating

- Discard externally imposed regimens (dieting)
- Replace with internally-directed eating
 - Honor your hunger*
 - Feel your fullness*
 - Please your palate
- Temper choices for nutritional value

* Phrases coined by Tribole and Resch, Intuitive Eating, 1995.

Supporting Normalized Eating

- Body Trust
 - Body has competent weight regulation system
 - Hunger, satiety and pleasure guide it
 - Recognizing internal cues is learnable
- Body Acceptance
 - Lightening up on the pressure to lose weight and the despair empowers people to move on
- Address emotional eating
 - The drive to eat when not physically hungry may be an indicator of wanting to suppress or manage difficult feelings
 - This drive to take care of oneself is positive and should be respected; developing self-care skills decreases need for emotional eating

How people change

- **Old paradigm: The reason for change is to lose weight and/or prevent disease.**
 - Fear is used as a motivator.
 - Typically not sustained.
- **New paradigm: The reason for change is pleasure, self-efficacy, and a sense of purpose and meaning.**
 - Enjoyment is the motivator.
 - Sustainable!

The "Live Well" Pledge

- Today, I will try to feed myself when I am hungry.
- Today, I will try to be attentive to how foods taste and make me feel.
- Today, I will try to choose foods that I like and that make me feel good.
- Today, I will try to honor my body's signals of fullness.
- Today, I will try to find an enjoyable way to move my body.
- Today, I will not try to change my body to fit others' standards.
- Today, I will try to look kindly at my body, and to treat it with love and respect.

Bacon, *Eat Well*; 2006.

First, Do No Harm

- **Eliminate programs for weight loss and obesity treatment/prevention. Concerns:**
 - Generates wide-spread anxiety about weight
 - Promotes preoccupation with food, disordered eating, and distrust of body
 - Stigmatizes larger people
 - Sends a message to thin people that health behaviors don't matter
 - Not effective
- **Children have been targeted as particularly "at risk," resulting in weight surveillance/regulation of behaviors**
 - Poses similar concerns to adult "obesity panic"

Join the Peace Movement

Health at Every Size

Supporting people of all sizes in valuing themselves and making healthy change.

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Bacon: Current Writing

- **Health at Every Size: Finding Your Happy Weight**
 - Publication status: in negotiation
- **Eat Well... for your Self, for the World**
 - Available as a work in progress at www.lulu.com/LindaBacon

E-mail Bacon to join mailing list for publication updates