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Diet-busting book focuses on health

Special to The Enterprise

Weight-conscious readers, slogging their way through holiday feasts and dreading the perennial New Year's diet resolution, may find welcome relief in the new book "Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight," by Linda Bacon, a UC Davis nutritionist and independent nutrition consultant.

"'Health at Every Size' is not a weight-loss book, a diet book or an exercise program," said Bacon. "It is a book about healthy living designed to support people who have struggled with their weight, as they shift their focus from hating themselves and fighting their bodies to learning to appreciate themselves, their bodies and their lives."

In the 224-page paperback, published this fall by Benbella Books, Bacon encourages readers to emphasize healthy living rather than dieting or exercise programs. Instead of focusing on calorie counting and exercise, she advises readers to pay more attention to internal body cues that signal hunger and fullness.

"Fat isn't the problem," Bacon said. "Dieting is the problem. A society that rejects anyone whose body shape or size doesn't match an impossible ideal is the problem. A medical establishment that equates 'thin' with 'healthy' is the problem."

Bacon explains the biological and cultural underpinnings of individuals' weight and why weight loss is rarely maintained over the long run.

The book follows a two-year, federally funded study, published in 2005 in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, in which Bacon and colleagues evaluated the concept known as Health at Every Size, which does not involve dieting. They found that significant improvements in metabolic and psychological health were made when women learned to recognize and follow internal hunger cues and began feeling better about their size and shape.

Those participating in the study group that followed the nondieting Health at Every Size methods completed the study and made significant improvements in their blood pressure, cholesterol levels, physical activity and self-esteem. The dieters they were compared to may have lost weight initially but gained it all back by the end of the two-year study, losing any initial health benefits.

"It is my hope that this book will serve as a timely resource that helps readers understand how to heal their relationship to food and to their bodies, offering reassurance to all those who have struggled with their weight," she said.

More information about the book is available online at www.HAESbook.com.