

Commentary

**Dieting may Cause More Harm than Good:
Mindful Eating may be a Healthier Approach to Managing Weight**

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I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but dieting rarely results in long-term weight loss. Documented studies report that that 95% of people who lose weight by dieting will regain it in 1-5 years (Mann et al., 2007). This multibillion dollar business has become very lucrative. Americans spend approximately 35 billion dollars annually on weight loss products (Mann et al., 2007). In our fast-paced, quick-fix society, people want rapid results and big gains. The weight-loss industry has capitalized on the public's desire to attain the ideal *celebrity* size and body type.

Restrictive weight loss programs may actually cause more physical, emotional, and psychological harm than good. Restrictive dieting can rob the body of vital minerals and nutrients. To function at its best, the body needs food. Food provides the energy and nutrition for optimal health. The U. S. Department of Agriculture nutrition guidelines recommend that humans eat carbohydrates, vegetables, fruit, dairy, protein, and oils, daily (Young & Nestle, 2003). Unfortunately, many individuals who are dieting substitute questionable powders and pills that lack proper nutritional value for food.

The food deprivation caused by dieting can be counterproductive for weight loss. The body responds to dieting as starvation. The body's natural response to starvation is to reserve energy and slow down metabolism. When the metabolism slows, fewer calories are burned, making it harder to lose weight (Selig, 2014).

Lastly, dieting can send faulty messages to people suggesting that there is something wrong with their shape or size. Thinner is not necessarily healthier. Instead of dieting, psychotherapy may be warranted to address body image issues or unmask the emotional and psychological triggers of emotional eating. (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006)

Mindful Eating

Since diets don't work, what does? The advice to eat what we want can make most of us extremely anxious. This message is counter intuitive from the environmental messages most of us have received. We must remember that intuitively we were born with the skills to adequately nourish ourselves. *Mindful Eating* is a tool designed for the client to trust his or her internal instinct and cues for appetite and satiation (Bays, 2009). As infants, we naturally follow these cues, but as we develop and are exposed to environmental influences, we begin to distrust our internal instinct (Dunkley, Masheb, & Grilo, 2010).

Mindful Eating is a positive tool designed to support individuals' capacity to reconnect the internal cues of hunger and satiation. It is part of a plan that supports living well, leading a healthy lifestyle and accepting the diversity of body weight and size. After years of dieting their way to *higher weights*, many people lose

weight by adopting mindful eating. This approach has been documented to contribute to improved self-esteem, lower cholesterol, and blood pressure. (Dunkley, Masheb, & Grilo, 2010).

Mindful eating is:

- a peaceful eating relationship with food according to your body's needs
- eating to support your body's natural healthy state
- balance, choice, wisdom, and acceptance
- eating consciously in a way to make your body feel well
- being aware of your surroundings, mind, body, and spirit
- being "in the moment"

Mindful eating is NOT:

- dieting
- measuring or weighing food
- restricting or avoiding foods
- counting fat grams or calories
- worrying about body size or "ideal" weight

Conclusion

The environment in which we live needs to change in order to promote a culture that embraces people of all sizes and weights. Instead of focusing on weight and dieting in order to meet an unrealistic standard of beauty, we should promote healthy lifestyles for the sake of being healthy. We must support media campaigns that promote the idea that people of all sizes are beautiful. Then maybe we can return to our child-like state of being able to properly nourish ourselves (without any input from society). This will allow us to dismantle the obsession with food and return to the *pleasure* of eating.

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