

Health At Every Size®

A healthy weight is the weight your body settles at when you have a balanced lifestyle

New evidence on weight and health

Over the past 20 or so years an increasing number of scientists and health professionals worldwide have realised that viewing people's weight as an indicator of health is both problematic and misleading. There is a large body of scientific evidence showing that people of different sizes and shapes can have good health and wellbeing. Research also shows that focusing on the notion of 'ideal' body size and shape can do more harm than good.

Weight centred health paradigm

The 'weight centred health paradigm' views weight as being of primary importance to a person's health and well being. Government programs, media, and the weight loss, pharmaceutical and beauty industries all promote the message that weight is a direct cause of health problems, and that to be healthy you have to be within the so-called 'healthy weight' category. But scientific evidence shows that people of all sizes and shapes can be healthy and well. There are more effective ways to improve your health than trying to achieve a certain weight.

Ineffective for most people

Scientific evidence now confirms what most people know themselves – losing weight and maintaining weight loss are very difficult tasks. In fact the long term failure rate of weight loss programs is as high as 95%. Worse than that, there is new scientific evidence shows that focusing on weight can actually be harmful.

Harmful effects for individuals

The harmful effects for individuals of focusing on weight instead of health include:

- ✗ low self esteem
- ✗ body image dissatisfaction and negative self talk
- ✗ adoption of harmful practices such as dieting, using laxatives or diet pills, vomiting, fasting, smoking, over-exercising and weight loss surgery
- ✗ eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder
- ✗ weight cycling: losing and regaining weight again and again
- ✗ delaying or avoiding health screening or health care

Harmful effects for society

The weight centred health paradigm has significant negative impacts on the way people are treated by others in society. Body size oppression includes bias, stigmatisation, prejudice, marginalisation, discrimination, harassment, bullying and violence on the basis of body shape or size.

What can we do?

We need a more caring approach to health that is based on scientific evidence and acknowledges the desire and the capacity for people of all sizes to optimise their wellbeing, whilst acknowledging the broader social determinants of health that are outside our personal control. The Health At Every Size® (HAES®) approach does just that, by focusing on self care and social justice.

Health and Wellbeing for



Health At Every Size® Principles

The Health At Every Size® approach **promotes***

1. Weight inclusivity

Accepting and respecting the inherent diversity of body shapes and sizes and rejecting the idealizing or pathologizing of specific weights

2. Health enhancement

Supporting health policies that improve and equalize access to information and services, and personal practices that improve human wellbeing, including attention to individual physical, economic, social, spiritual, emotional, and other needs

3. Respectful care

Acknowledging our biases, and working to end weight discrimination, weight stigma and weight bias; providing information and services from an understanding that socio-economic status, race, gender, sexual orientation, age and other identities impact weight stigma, and supporting environments that address these inequities

4. Eating for wellbeing

Promoting flexible, individualized eating based on hunger, satiety, nutritional needs and pleasure, rather than any externally regulated eating plan focused on weight control

5. Life enhancing movement

Supporting physical activities that allow people of all sizes, abilities and interests to engage in enjoyable movement, to the degree they choose

The Health At Every Size® approach **opposes**

6. Linking health to an 'ideal' weight

The notion that health can be defined by an 'ideal' body mass index, body weight, waist circumference or percentage body fat

7. The pursuit of deliberate weight loss

The use of dieting, drugs, programs, products or surgery for the primary purpose of weight loss

8. Body assumptions

Assumptions that a person's body size, weight or body mass index is evidence of a particular way of eating, physical activity level, personality, psychological state, moral character or health status

9. Body size oppression

Any form of oppression including bias, exploitation, marginalisation, discrimination, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, harassment or violence against people based on their body image, body size or weight, and any approach to health, eating or exercise, the provision of products, services or amenities which focuses on body weight or perpetuates body size oppression

10. Healthism

An ideology in which individuals are deemed to have total responsibility for their health, are morally obliged to pursue the goal of perfect health, and are personally blamed if they get sick