

SPOT DIET CULTURE

Diet culture is everywhere. It is the set of beliefs/ideas that places value /importance on thinness, weight loss, shape, size and overall appearance as being most important over and above health and well-being. It also holds the assumption that health is somehow synonymous with weight. However, we know that weight is a very poor predictor of someone's health and health outcomes.

If you've been influenced by diet culture, IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. It is pervasive and something we are taught from a young age. But together we can start to change how we understand and respond to health, health behaviours, weight and appearance.

The following examples might help you recognise and spot diet culture.

LOOKS LIKE...

- Before and after photos with the thinner "after" considered 'better'
- Dieting/ avoiding certain foods/ restricting
- / following strict rules/ detoxing/ counting calories
- "Fitspo" / use of filters/ editing images
- Products - shape wear/ sizing of clothing
- Avoidance of situations because of your appearance/weight
- Exercise for punishment or as a means of compensating for eating



You look so thin /great/ how did you do it?
She would be so pretty if she lost weight!
My daughter is looking chubby and I am worried about her weight.



SOUNDS LIKE...

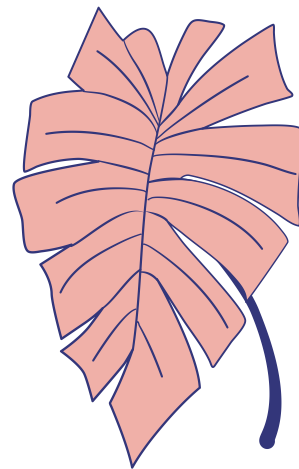
- Praise for losing weight/ compliments
- Health professionals focusing on BMI/weight
- Judgement of people in larger bodies
- Expression of worry about yours or someone else's weight
- Food labels - 'good' 'bad' 'healthy' 'unhealthy'
- Statements such as **"I am so bad for eating this"** **"I shouldn't really have that"** **"I shouldn't eat junk"** **"It's great if you accept your size, but it's not for me - I need to lose weight"** **"I have to watch my weight"** **"Are you sure you want to eat that?"** **"I can't have that, it has too many calories"** **"Wow, you're good eating a salad"** **"I am on a detox"**

FEELS LIKE...

- Fear of eating certain foods
- Need to justify your eating
- Feeling like you 'need' to lose weight or be thinner
- Believing thin is better / will fix things
- Guilt around food
- Feeling like a failure
- Self-worth based on weight / feeling defined by what you eat/look like



WHAT TO DO INSTEAD OF DIETING

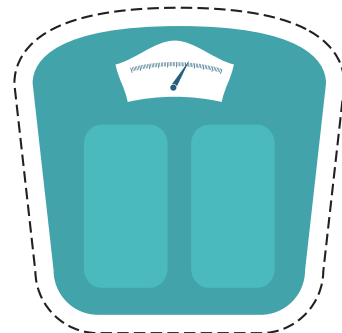


We know that thinking about diet culture can be confronting. It is everywhere and it has been normalised. It is not your fault! We hope that the following steps help in dismantling diet culture and considering what to do instead.



DITCH THE SCALES/NUMBERS

There is a lot of focus out there on achieving a specific weight goal, counting calories, counting macros, calculating numbers, BMI etc. This can be very harmful. **Numbers are a very poor predictors of overall health** - that is, we cannot determine someone's health based on their weight, their BMI or the number of calories they eat. In addition to that, our bodies are *thought* to have their own set points - the weight that the body wants to sit at that is the healthiest for us. Many factors influence this weight including genetics. **So instead, let go of any numbers - they tell us nothing useful!** Numbers only create more anxiety and stress. This might look like getting rid of the scale, throwing out any measuring apparatus and learning more about behaviours that truly promote health.



RECOGNISE DIET CULTURE & NAME IT

Now that you have more awareness of what diet culture looks like, sounds like and feels like, it can be helpful to start to recognise it. When does it come up/ where do you hear it? You have the option to name it and when possible, gently disengage - if it's a conversation, gently saying *"Talking about diets is not helpful for me, do you mind if we talk about something else"*? or something similar can be helpful. It might also look like choosing to no longer diet or engage in conversations about weight. This is hard, because many people have diet culture imposed on them and experience so much prejudice - any small step in recognising this is helpful.



HEALTH DOES NOT REQUIRE RESTRICTION OR DEPRIVATION

The body does not need to fast, detox, or to follow strict rules. **The more we restrict, the more we are not listening to our body's signals which is likely to lead to binge eating.** The body doesn't know the difference between a diet and famine and it will respond in the same way. It will force us to become preoccupied with food, seek out food higher in energy and density and eat quicker! Eating less does not necessarily lead to better health, so instead, let's focus on health behaviours - what is your body telling you it needs? What you like to eat? Also wonder if there are other needs that require your attention that may be being met through food - rest, soothing etc. We are more likely to engage in health behaviours if we take the pressure off and reduce the focus on weight.



FOOD IS PART OF LIFE

We cannot live or go without food - it is essential and it is our fuel source. However, at the same time it does not have to be the central part of our life. **Food is part of life in general and we can work toward viewing it as it is** - a part of life, part of events and celebrations and what fuels us. It's not good or bad or something that has to be controlled or feared.



FOCUS ON OTHER THINGS

The more focus we place on weight and appearance, the less time and energy we have for other things. **So instead, let's focus on other things** - doing things you enjoy, spending time with friends and family, going places and doing activities that nourish your soul.



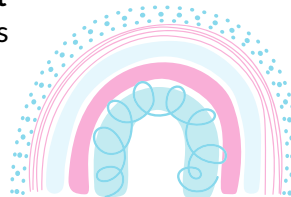
EAT INTUITIVELY

This may sound really simple, but our bodies are designed to be intuitive and tell us what we need. If we can learn to listen to our bodies, we'll move closer toward a more healthy and happy relationship with food and ourselves. **So try moving toward this - eating when you are hungry, stopping when you are satisfied, noticing how you feel before and after a meal and eating what you feel like.** Notice if this feels any different as you start to listen to your body's needs.



MOVE WITH PLEASURE

Instead of punishing yourself with exercise or engaging in exercise that you feel you 'should' be doing, consider the benefits of moving your body in ways that feel right for you, nourishing and energising. We know that exercise isn't very effective at weight control anyway. **Find what your body enjoys and do that instead.** We are more likely to stick with something we enjoy and know feels good.



SHOW UP

Don't wait around to be at a specific weight or for your body to meet an idealised standard - show up and do things now! Stop missing out on life and pleasure. **Your body is ready and able to let you experience life regardless of its weight and what it looks like.**