

Body Image and Rethinking Diets

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Weight loss commercials are already in full swing. You are not alone if the impending new year prompts nagging thoughts about getting into better shape. Many people feel unsatisfied with their body, especially after the holidays. January 1 promises a clean slate with a renewed resolve to do what it takes to get the weight off. But, *do diets really work?* Many experts assert that overall diets actually just perpetuate an ongoing cycle of weight loss/weight gain. And, what are the physical and mental costs of the diet mentality and the pressure to look a certain way?

Diets can and often do produce short-term, even fast weight loss results. But it is a tall order to maintain the sort of momentum and adherence to rigid rules that most diets require. Usually, people's resolve ends up fizzling out, and the weight creeps back on- leaving the dieter feeling like a failure *and* dissatisfied with their body. In contrast, an approach that comes from a place of listening to the body, self-compassion, and acceptance, is much more powerful and sustainable when it comes to making peace with your body and eating habits.

Helpful Tips:

- 1.) Tune into your internal cues for hunger & fullness. Ask yourself frequently how hungry/full you are on a scale of 1-10 (1 being ravenous & 10 being uncomfortably full).
- 2.) Eat enough throughout the day. Letting yourself get too hungry or "saving up calories" can lead to overdoing it later. Think about the Thanksgiving Day binge.
- 3.) Tune into your body cues about the type of food you need/want: protein, carb, something salty, hot, cold, light, or crunchy. If you have a particular craving... go for it! If you don't 'scratch the itch' you may end up overeating because you were left feeling unsatisfied.
- 4.) Words matter. Putting ourselves down can have a powerful effect on our psyche, which in turn can lead to comfort or stress eating. Resist the urge to make statements like "I feel so fat", instead, say "I'm having body image issues today".
- 5.) Self-Compassion. When we are overly critical or deprive ourselves, it can end up causing a rebound effect. For many, the drill sergeant/all or nothing approaches to diet and exercise are not sustainable and do little for our self-esteem. When we overeat, we have to tell ourselves that it's okay. Yes! It is okay. The sky will not fall out on top of us!
- 6.) Wear clothes that fit. Wearing clothes that are too tight can send the message: "it's unacceptable the way I am now." Harsh messages just set us up to need something to feel better, and thus increase our chances of turning to things like food for comfort.
- 7.) Do exercise that you enjoy and have realistic routines/goals. Don't set yourself up for failure. Some exercise is better than none.
- 8.) Support. Reach out to your support system to process stressors and to talk about what's going on in your life. Feeling connected to others will help with the urges to stress eat.

Hirt Psychology offers therapy and psychological consultation services for adolescents and adults.

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