

Dispelling Common Myths About Large- Sized People

Here are some myths and facts about large-sized people. We use the term "fat" here freely because despite its negative connotations, many fat people are reclaiming the word as their own. It's simply a descriptive term. It might make people uncomfortable, but can be regarded in positive ways. Daily, large-sized people face discrimination, especially in areas of employment, insurance, health care, education, adoption, access, and social interaction. Women are the main victims of discrimination based on size.

Myth #1 "You could lose weight if you wanted to."

>> Facts: Diets can make you fat. When people diet, most regain their lost weight; some gain even more than they lost. Most of the agony and obsession about food occurs because continuous dieting raises the body's natural "set-point" and keeps the individual in a constant state of near-starvation.

Myth #2 "It's your own fault that you're fat. It just takes willpower."

>> Facts: Diets are temporary -- they work, but just for a short time. Only 2-5% of all people who lose weight can maintain that loss over 3 years or more. This figure has been constant for many years; yet the \$37 billion diet industry, the health profession, the media and the public continue to believe and espouse the internalized myths that being thin is the only acceptable body size. Current research shows that many of us are genetically predisposed to be large, and because diets can make you fat, with heredity and a history of "yo-yo" diets, many people become even larger.

In addition, many ethnic groups with the genetic predisposition are stigmatized in other ways in our society.

Myth #3 "But it's not healthy to be fat."

>> Facts: One can be fat and fit. Dozens of studies, tracking people in cities all over the globe, some from birth to death, have proven the opposite: that it is more dangerous to be extremely thin than extremely fat. Smoking, for example, can be a more serious hazard than obesity. Yes, there are some health hazards, but the "yo-yo" syndrome can cause far more harm than maintaining a stable weight. Thin people also have diseases attributed to fatness. But most doctors often scold or hand large-sized patients a diet instead of timely or preventative care.

Don't assume fat people don't eat healthy foods or exercise. Just as you wouldn't assume that all thin people always eat healthy foods and exercise.

Myth #4 "But fat people are so ugly."

>> Facts: Beauty is a learned concept; we come in all shapes, colors, sizes, and abilities. Images of beauty continue to change over time. In her heyday Lillian Russell (actress) weighed over 200 pounds. Why not accept our bodies as they are and begin to see the beauty in our size diversity? When women begin to accept their bodies and stop dieting, often their self-esteem rises, stress and negativity drop, and compulsive eating may quiet down. After a year or more they may stop obsessing on food and begin to feel better about themselves. Then they can get on with their lives and not wait for that "magic" day to become thin.

Myth #5 "This is fine, but come on, aren't you eating all the time, and aren't you eating a high fat, high sugar, high salt diet?"

>> Facts: Fat people as a group are no more and no less than thin people as a group. Over a hundred studies (see Dieter's Dilemma) set out to prove that fat people eat more than thin people. All concluded the opposite: there is no measurable difference. Some thin people eat a lot; some fat people eat a lot. Some fat people eat lightly; some thin people eat lightly. As for healthy eating, the odds are true for both groups. Current research indicates that most people may be fat because of genetic predisposition and a history of dieting. This should not prevent them from quality of and full access to life. Size discrimination is no laughing matter. Yet cruel jokes about fat people are tolerated and encouraged. We give tacit permission to anti-fat humor or fat bigotry where we would never allow racist, sexist or homophobic humor.

In the late 1800's there were some who tried to bleach the skin of black people so they would appear to look white. In China women used to bind their feet so they'd look small. Some people today believe dieting is akin to skin bleaching and foot binding. Torturous methods used to alter our looks so we can achieve an impossible standard of beauty that oppresses women.

What would happen if everyone stopped worrying about their weight or diet for just a few days? What would we talk about? Is it possible that all the focus and energy about food and body size could be directed towards improving our lives or solving problems, such as homelessness, pollution, racism and more?

Remember, you can be fat, and healthy. Whether you're fat or thin or somewhere in between, you are a beautiful, unique individual. Begin to accept yourself as you are and wonderful things will begin to happen. Don't punish your body by starving and trying to diminish yourself. It's not "good" to be thin or "bad" to be fat. Women are dying from the side effects of eating disorders, partly because of their fear of becoming fat.

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