

Fight Back ... Learning to Be Real

We all know that it is important to live a healthy lifestyle, however, on a regular and daily basis, we are faced with varying and individual challenges around maintaining healthy goals.

Dieting, as we know it, has become a national pastime, with billions of dollars being spent each year on items that are thought to assist us to attain the perfect image. Our society's preoccupation with body image can be reflected in that if surveyed, at any given time, approximately 70% of women and 35% of men would admit to be "dieting".

With the knowledge that media messages like advertising and celebrity spotlights are leading our culture to define what is beautiful and what is "good," it can be said that the media's power over our development of self-esteem and body image is incredibly strong.

Furthermore, although media screaming that "thin is in" may not always be a direct cause of problems around eating and eating disorders, it can be linked to the creation of a context within which people learn to place a value on the size and shape of their body.

Eating disorders are complex conditions that arise from a variety of factors, including physical, psychological, interpersonal, and social issues. They are not just about food, or dieting, but rather become a way in which individuals can cope with feelings that they find to be too difficult to deal with directly. They are a serious, and potentially life threatening condition.

With the glamorization of the so-called ideal body and the idea that dieting is a normal and necessary activity, how we see the world can become quite obscure and may certainly lead to more serious struggles.

What can you do to help reduce the effects of the unhealthy ideals around us and help prevent eating disorders?

- Discourage the idea that a particular diet, weight or body size will automatically lead to happiness and fulfillment, as this is NOT a fact.
- Choose to challenge the false belief that thinness and weight loss are great, while body fat and weight gain are horrible and indicate laziness, worthlessness, or immorality.
- Avoid categorizing foods as "good/safe" versus "bad/dangerous". Remember that we all need to eat a balanced variety of foods.
- Decide to avoid judging others, and yourself, on the basis of body weight or shape. Turn off the voices in your head that tell you that a person's weight says anything about their character, personality, or value as a person.
- Become a critical viewer of the media and its messages about self-esteem and body image. Talk back to the television when you hear comments or see images that promote thinness at all costs.
- Be a model of healthy self-esteem and body image. Recognize that others pay attention and learn from the way you talk about yourself and your body. Choose to talk about yourself with respect and appreciation.
- Value yourself based on your goals, accomplishments, talents, and character. Avoid letting the way you feel about your weight and shape determine the course of your day. Embrace the natural diversity of human bodies and celebrate your body as it is.

Next time the dieting desire crosses your mind take a time-out and think about the reasons why you want to lose weight. Are they really worth it? Are they important to your health? Think about the potential dangers of dieting. And, most of all, take the time to remember that *you are worth so much more than what you weigh!* Be Real...Listen to your body!!

**For more info on Self-Esteem, Body Image or Eating Disorders contact:
Tracy Young, RPN, BScPN, BSc., Community Mental Health Nurse, Mental Health Promotion Clinic. 571-8340 youngt@brandonrha.mb.ca.**