

# *What Can We Do To Prevent Eating Disorders?*

Many teenagers and adults of *normal* weight may “think” they are fat and pursue dieting in an effort to *fix* themselves. **But diets don’t work!** They are ineffective for managing weight because they usually make problems worse. Since overeating is not the only cause of excess weight, undereating is not the cure for being overweight. So, what are we able to do to prevent eating disorders? Here are some ideas that can help to prevent eating disorders.

## **Eat Naturally:**

- Promote internally regulated eating. Eat when you’re hungry, stop when you’re full.
- Do not count calories, fat grams, etc.
- Know the dangers of dieting.
- Eat a variety of nutritious foods.
- Avoid putting foods into categories: good/bad/safe/low-fat/fattening.

## **Body Acceptance:**

- Talk positively about your body.
- Accept all body shapes as a diverse part of the world.
- Know that weight gain is a sign of growth and good health for children.
- Be careful of attitudes that suggest “I’d like/love you more if you lost weight, etc”.
- Know the ways genetics can influence body shapes and sizes.
- Discuss “size-ism”; body size prejudice in your home.
- Ignore body shape as an indicator of a person’s personality or value.
- Avoid using phrases such as fat slob, pigging out, thunder thighs.
- Examine media messages regarding how bodies are supposed to look vs. what the reality is.
- Limit tv watching and fashion magazine reading. Discuss the images of the males and females presented.

## **Celebrate Yourself:**

- Encourage movement and playful activities.
- Know the value of activity as a means to promote good health, strength, and stamina.
- Ignore media messages that are designed to cause insecurity so we will buy products that “better ourselves”.

## **Healthy Relationship with Food and Body:**

- Don't restrict your food intake or talk about food in negative terms.
- Talk about eating and food in terms of health, pleasure, and physical satisfaction.
- Keep food and eating in perspective, as only one of life's pleasures.
- Refrain from withholding food as a punishment, using food as a reward or comfort.
- Make family meals relaxed and friendly.
- Do not comment on a person's eating habits.

## **Healthy Families:**

- Foster healthy relationships within your family.
- Discuss concerns about internally regulated eating, self-acceptance, etc with family members, doctors, dietitians, mental health care providers, friends.

## **Be an Influence in Your School:**

- Scrutinize your child's school for activities, posters, books, contests, etc. that endorse traditional ideals about thinness.
- Encourage your school to include images of successful females in its curriculum.
- Practice taking people more seriously for what they say, feel and do, not how they look.
- Do your best to develop a variety of interests and skills that can lead to happiness, personal expression, success, and fulfillment, without an emphasis on appearance!

© Updated: 3/06 Revised: 3/96