A Weight-Neutral Approach to Employee Health & Wellbeing

Exploring Weight Inclusion *in the Workplace*

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PRESENTED BY

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Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Objectives

1 Understand

The difference between weight-normative and weight-inclusive care models.

2 Learn

The impact of weight stigma and weight-based discrimination.

3 Consider

Practical ways to practice weight-inclusivity in workplace wellness programs.

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

What We Will Be Covering

OUTLINE

- Background
- Current State - Weight-Normative
  - Weight Bias
  - Weight Stigma
- Shifting Focus - Weight-Inclusion
  - Health at Every Size®
- Implementing a Weight-Inclusive Wellness Program
- Resources + Q:A

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

History

Body Mass Index (BMI)

1830s

Quetelet's Index

1972

Ancel Keys research used to assess and measure weight and obesity

1985

NIH ties obesity definition to BMI

1998

Change in BMI classifications

2001

US Surgeon General - obesity is a public health priority

2013

Obesity defined as disease by AMA

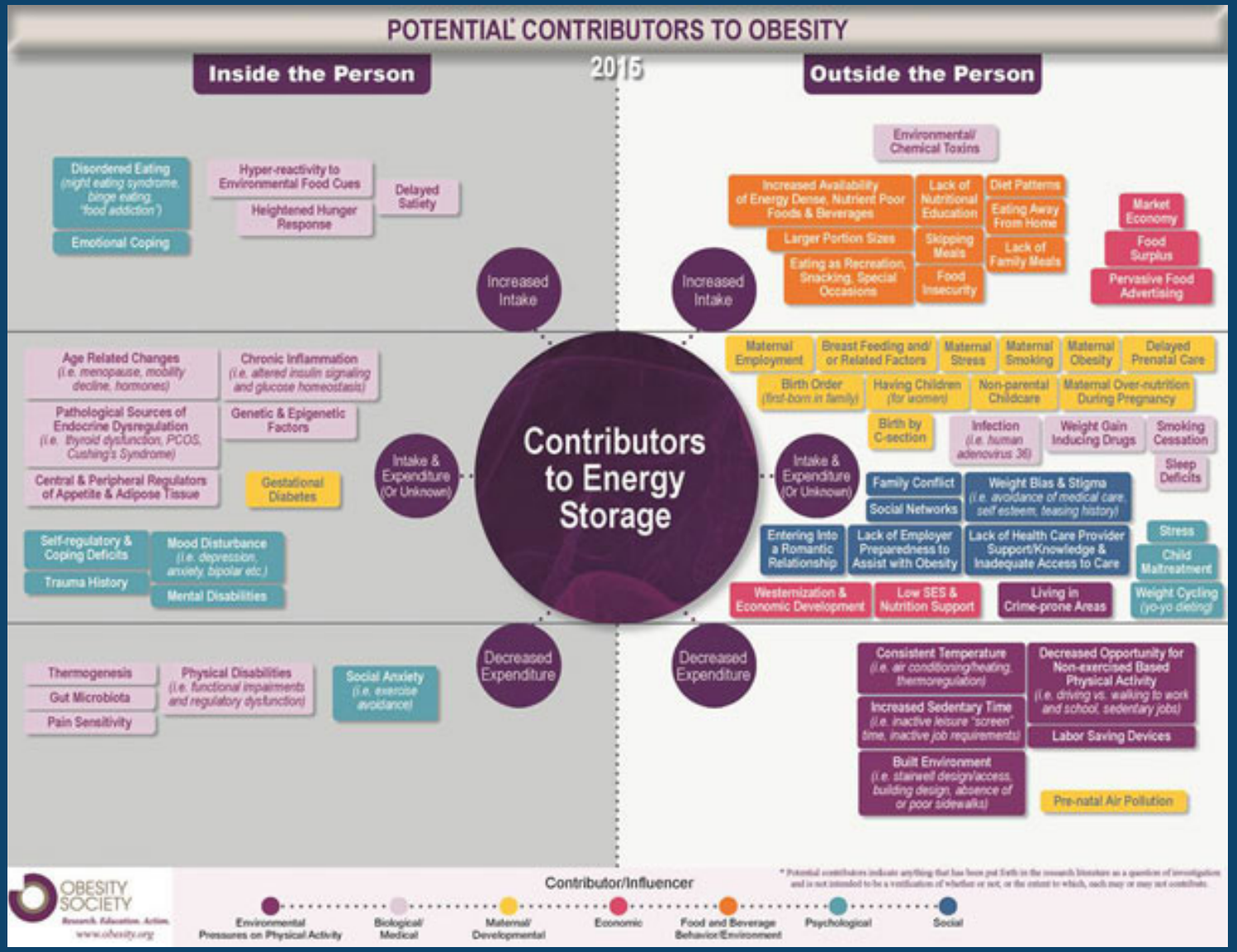
Weight Loss - An Easy Fix

Energy Balance Equation

Calories In

Calories Out

We've Oversimplified Weight Loss



What is a weight-centric, or weight-normative paradigm?

Weight-Normative

- Prioritizes weight as a main determinant of health.
- Assumes that weight and disease are related in a linear fashion.
- Diagnoses, treatment and care influenced by BMI.

Weight-Normative

What does this look like in our workplace health and wellness programs?

Weight-Normative

Bulk of epidemiological evidence suggests that five pounds underweight is more dangerous to health than seventy-five pounds overweight

Risk of Mortality	Highest	Lowest	Comparable
BMI	BMI < 18.5 *or* > 35	25 - 30	18.5 - 25 *and* 30 - 35

Journal of Obesity, 2014
Flegal, KM, Graubard, BI, Williamson, DF, Gail, MF (2007). Cause-specific excess deaths associated with underweight, overweight, and obesity. JAMA, 298(17), 2028-3037.

The Healthcare Norm

Regardless of whether or not it is relevant to the presenting concern,

patients seeking medical evaluations or treatment are typically evaluated first on the basis of their weight.

Journal of Obesity, 2014

What are some assumptions commonly made for people in larger bodies?

Weight Bias

The negative attitudes, beliefs, judgments, stereotypes, and discriminatory acts aimed at individuals simply because of their weight.

Obesity Action Coalition, 2021

Weight Stigma

Weight stigma is the social rejection and devaluation that accrue to those who do not comply with prevailing social norms of adequate body weight and shape

BMC Medicine, 2018

Weight Stigma

Weight stigma impacts access to and avoidance of healthcare.

Patients in larger bodies are:

› **less likely** to complete preventive healthcare services, including:

- Cancer screens
- Pelvic exams
- Mammograms

› **more likely** to delay and/or cancel appointments

Archives of Family Medicine

Weight Stigma

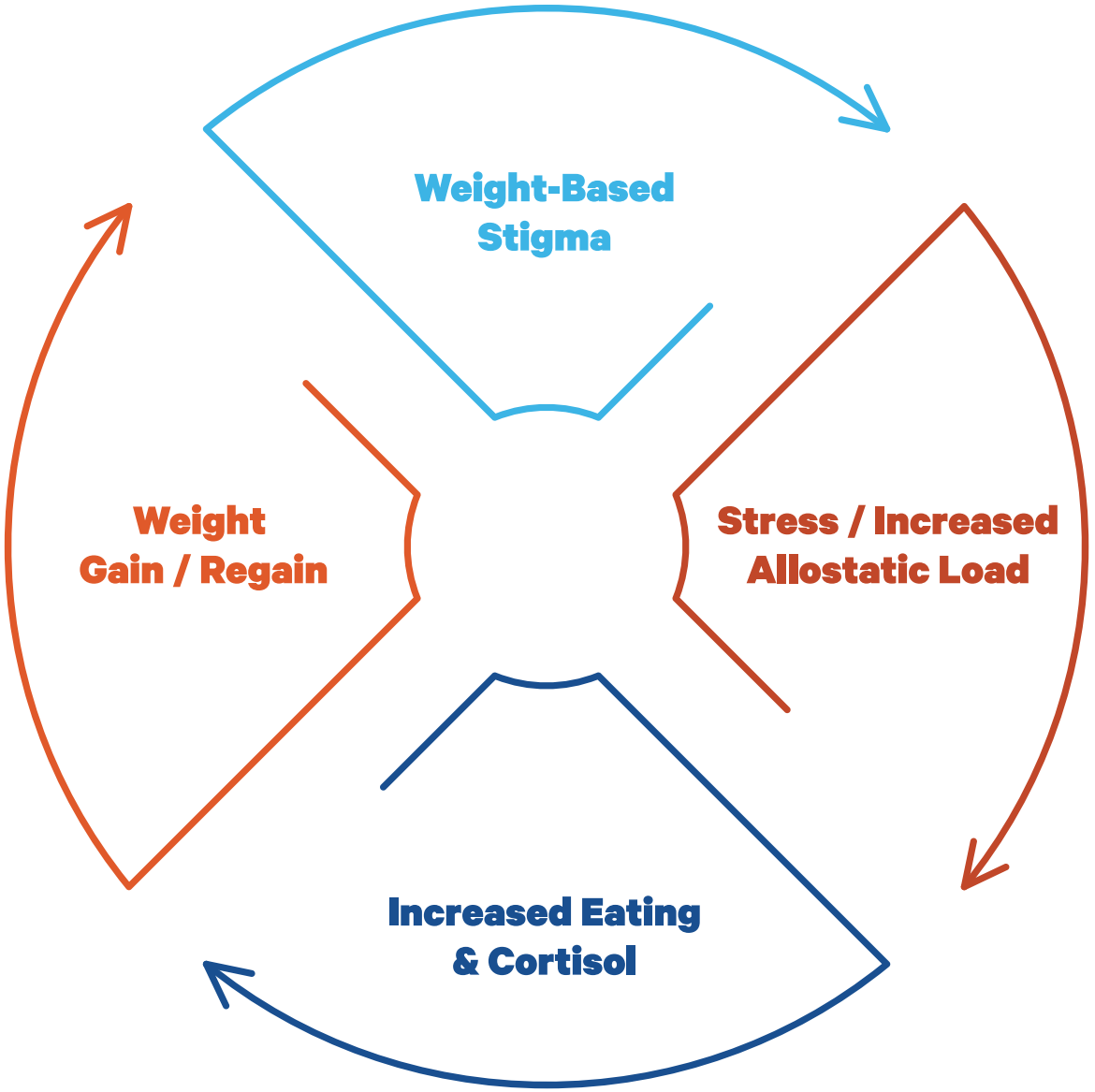
Experienced weight stigma is specifically associated with:

- Elevated blood pressure
- Negative body image, low self-esteem, and **depression**
- **Increased risk of mood disorder, anxiety disorder, and eating disorder**
- **Predicts oxidative stress, systemic inflammation, cortisol secretion**

Clinical Diabetes | Eating Behaviors, Vol. 9 No. 2 | National Eating Disorders Association
The Weight-Inclusive versus Weight-Normative Approach to Health: Evaluating the Evidence for Prioritizing Well-Being over Weight Loss, Tylka et al., Journal of Obesity, Vol. 2014, Article ID 983495
Evidence-Based Rationale for Adopting Weight-Inclusive Health Policy, Social Issues and Policy Review, Vol 14, No 1, 2020

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Cycle of Weight Stigma



Appetite, 2014

What does it mean to be weight-inclusive?

Weight-Inclusive Approach

A weight-inclusive approach is:

- An assumption that everybody is capable of pursuing health and well-being **independent of weight**, given access to non-stigmatizing health care
- Against prescribing weight loss for health
- Multi-faceted approach to health

Weight-Inclusive Approach

A weight-inclusive approach is **not**:

- Assumption that everyone is **healthy** at every size
- Anti-weight loss approach

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Health at Every Size®

Health at Every Size (HAES) is a weight-neutral approach that supports people adopting **health habits for the sake of health and well-being**, rather than weight control.

Weight Inclusivity

Accept and respect the inherent diversity of body shapes and sizes and reject the idealizing or pathologizing of specific weights.

"Health at Every Size Principles", Association for Size Diversity and Health

The
Pro
Scie

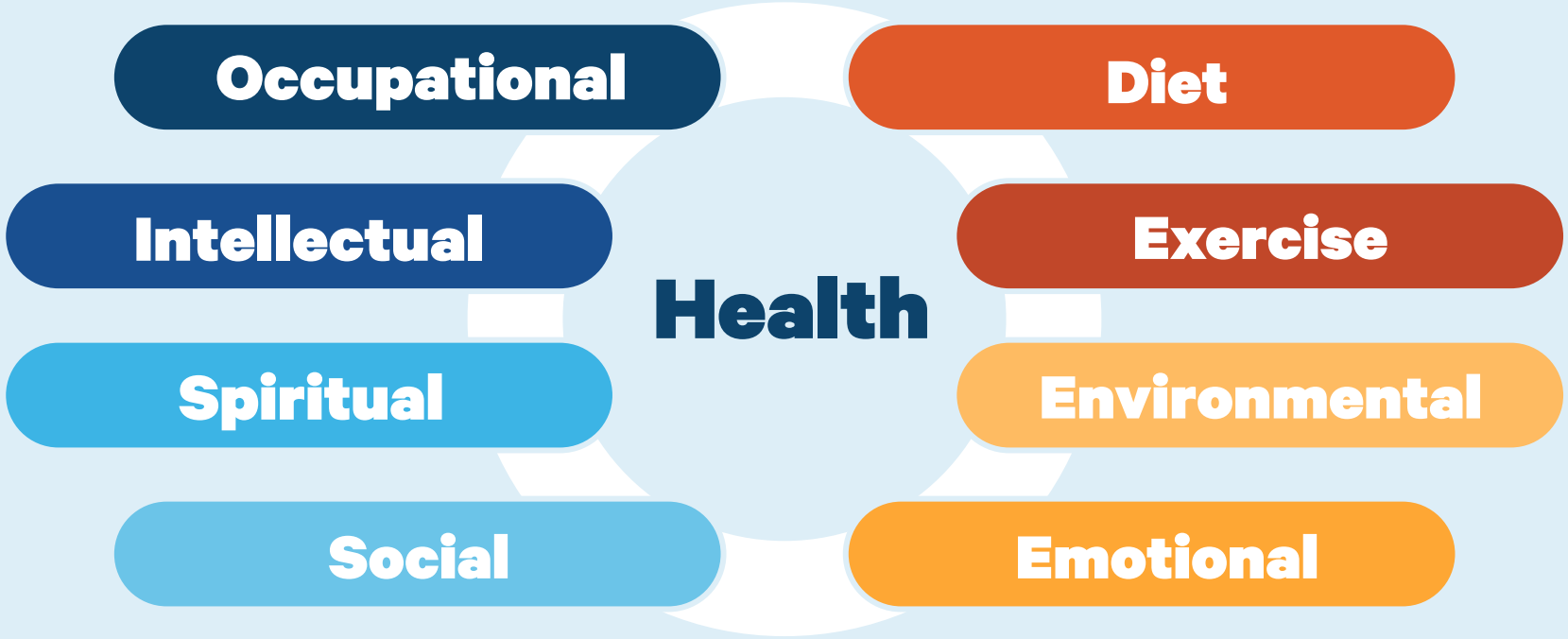
You cannot tell how healthy someone is by looking at them.

Health at Every Size®

Additional Health at Every Size® (HAES) Principles:

- **Health Enhancement:** attending to emotional, physical and spiritual well being, without focusing on weight loss or achieving a specific "ideal weight"
- Promotes size acceptance and size diversity
- Works to dismantle systemic weight stigma
- Encourages of intuitive eating and joyful movement

Weight Does Not Equal Health



How can you incorporate weight-inclusive practices in your wellness program?

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Check Your Bias

Harvard & Project Implicit® created a series of short tests to help individuals recognize their implicit attitudes towards a wide array of topics including weight.

Take the Harvard & Project Implicit® Health Quiz

Unlearn Weight Bias

Do the work to unlearn traditional healthcare beliefs about weight, personal fat-phobia, and/or thin bias.

Start to notice weight stigma in the world, and work to be an advocate for social justice.

Dismantle the Thin Ideal

In both personal and professional practices and communications, work to dismantle the thin ideal by highlighting body diversity and avoiding language that implies a thin person is healthier than others, simply because of their body type.

Market to all body types and ability levels.

Stop Conflating BMI (or Weight) with Health

What ways are we currently associating BMI with health and how can we move away from it?

If possible, omit the measurement from:

- Marketing & Communications
- Wellness Activities (Challenges)
- Health Evaluations
- Health-Contingent Program Criteria

Change Your Language

- Practice talking about health without including weight qualifiers.
- Practice not using body descriptors.
- Don’t comment on weight changes (loss or gain). If it comes up, keep your language neutral.
- Provide activities focused on goals and behavior changes that don’t revolve around weight loss.

Focus on health goals and activities that emphasize behaviors that participants might want to work on through your wellness programs.

Expand Your Program Design

To address all facets of health: nutrition, movement, family and personal health history, stressors, environment, emotional health, support systems...what else?

Focus on Behaviors

Focus on health goals and activities that emphasize health-promoting **behaviors** that participants may want to work on through your wellness programs. Consider:

- Program Design
- Wellness Activities
- Criteria for Earning Rewards/Incentives

Create a Weight-Inclusive Referral Network

- Seek partnerships and referral sources that practice weight-inclusivity. *Hold partners accountable.*
- Encourage partners to address stigmatizing language in all communication and marketing content.
- Request body diversity in photos, videos, and text.

Quick Tips

Where do I start?

- Go back to your goals
- Identify your barriers
- Draft a multi-year strategy
- Commit to one small change
- Find support

Maximize Health > Minimize Weight

Examples

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Examples

Maintain Don’t Gain

Healthy Holidays

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Examples

Steps Challenge

Movement Matters

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Examples

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Positive Food Talk

How to Talk Food with Kids

"Clean your plate" and "finish xyz if you want dessert" are common phrases in many households. Phrases like these are commonly used with good intention to encourage children, but often end up creating pressure and tension around feeding. The words and phrases used around feeding can have a lasting impact on a child's relationship with food and the emotions and habits they associate with food.

The ability to sense hunger and fullness is innate in everyone. When a child overrides these bodily signals due to pressure feeding, the signals become less clear and are eventually dulled enough that they are no longer recognized. Grazing (frequent snacking) between meals can dampen hunger and fullness cues, increase picky eating, and displace more healthful foods at mealtime. Pressure feeding can also worsen picky eating. Instead, try pairing a new food with a favorite or 'safe' food. Persistent exposure is key as it can take 20 or more exposures to a food before a toddler will accept it.

When mealtime becomes a stressful battle between the will of the caregiver and the will of the child, a negative relationship develops. By setting a good example through sitting down at the table, eating together, and establishing a structure of three meals and 2-3 snacks a day, the caregiver can shape a child's food habits.

Follow the Division of Responsibility in Feeding - It is the caregiver's responsibility to provide healthy meals and determine when and where to serve them. It is the child's job to determine what foods are eaten and how much.

May Not Help	vs.	May Help A Lot
Apples are good for you.		Red foods give you a strong heart.
Carrots will turn you into a bunny.		Orange food helps you see in the dark.
This food will help you grow.		Yellow food helps your body heal cuts.
Salad is healthy.		Green food helps you fight off sickness.
Blueberries have antioxidants in them.		Blue & purple foods give you a strong brain.
White food isn't good for you.		White foods give you energy.

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Better You BINGO

Better You BINGO is a fun twist on the classic party game and is designed to promote overall health and wellness.

Complete 5 activities in the same row, column, or diagonally to get a BINGO. Have fun!

B	I	N	G	O
Complete the Spell Your Name Workout Wildcard Challenge	Accomplish something on your to-do list	Unplug from unnecessary technology for 1 day	Give 4 compliments	Incorporate fruits & vegetables into all three meals one day this week
Practice 10 minutes of mindfulness	Write in a journal to capture mindful reflections from the day	Volunteer in person or virtually; Visit Volunteer Match to find opportunities	Write & deliver a thank you note to a friend or coworker	Take a walk during your lunch break
Spend at least 10 minutes decluttering your workspace	Write down 5 things you're grateful for	Free Space	Connect with a coworker & learn something new about them	Read & implement ideas found in Exploring Ergonomics
Read Post-Workout Nutrition - try two of the suggested snack ideas	Reevaluate your budget by reviewing last month's expenses	Drink 32 ounces of water at work today	Stop electronics or screen use 30 minutes before bed to promote better sleep	Work on a creative project outside of work for at least 30 minutes
Try a new recipe	Watch Connect to Your Work - incorporate at least one recommendation	Spend 30 minutes outside	Expand your interests by reading for fun	Perform an act of service

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The Health at Every Size Paradigm
Becoming a Body Positive Workplace

What is Health at Every Size?

Health at Every Size (HAES) is a weight-neutral approach that supports the adoption of health-promoting habits for the sake of health and well-being, rather than weight control. HAES encourages the acceptance and respect of the natural diversity of body shapes and sizes. HAES promotes finding joy in moving one's body and eating in a flexible manner that honors internal cues of hunger, satiety, and appetite.

HAES challenges the assumptions that:

- Body fat poses significant morbidity and mortality risk
- Weight loss will prolong life
- Anyone who is determined can lose weight and keep it off through diet and exercise
- The pursuit of weight loss is a practical and positive goal
- The best way for people living in larger bodies to improve health is to lose weight

Weight Stigma and Bias in the Workplace

Most of us are aware of or have been subject to discrimination based on race, gender, and age, but have you ever considered the discrimination that can occur with body size? Unfortunately, a person's size can impact how they are treated.

Learn how you can avoid discrimination and promote body positivity within your organization below.

Those who are **overweight** are **less likely to be hired**, **less likely to be promoted** within their own company, and on average, **make less money** than those with smaller bodies who are doing the same job.

Becoming a Body POSITIVE Workplace

	Concept to Apply	What It Looks Like in the Workplace
P	Prioritize healthy behaviors over body size	Avoid weight-based wellness challenges. Use measures other than weight & BMI to track success (i.e. behaviors).
O	Own your biases	Evaluate your natural thoughts. What goes through your mind when you see an overweight person? A thin person?
S	Stop harmful food and diet talk	Avoid shaming people for what they eat (whether healthy or unhealthy). Avoid weight and diet-based conversations.
I	Inclusivity	Review your procedure for selecting health committee members and wellness champions. Is your committee representative of all body shapes and sizes?
T	Talk it out	Create space for open conversations about body image and body positivity.
I	Incentives	Offer choice in wellness programming. Consider offering an activity fund rather than a gym membership.
V	Vet your policies	Review your hiring and promotion policies to ensure that people of all sizes are treated equally.
E	Encourage joyful movement	Encourage employees to take breaks and walk together. Broaden your perspective of what "counts" as exercise.

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Mindful and intuitive eating can each play an important role in re-establishing a healthy relationship with food, becoming more in tune with ourselves, and learning how to make meals a more positive experience. Meals are meant to be shared in the company of others or be a dedicated space in the day free of the external distractions that constantly bombard our lives. By integrating the practices into your own routine, you can facilitate positive changes to result in a happier and healthier you!

What does it mean to be mindful?

- Being aware and intentional of your eating habits
- Slowing down by taking 10-15 seconds to enjoy each bite
- Appreciating the full experience your food has to offer by taking in the tastes, textures, and smells it boasts

How do I practice Mindful eating?

- Eat in the company of others
- Avoid eating in front of screens
- Pause before diving into your meal to appreciate what is in front of you
- Continually use your 5 senses to take in the appearance, smell, sound, texture, and flavor of the meal
- Set down your fork or utensil in between bites or use your non-dominant hand to slow your pace. Eating is about the experience, not a race to the finish line

"Having a healthy relationship with food means you are not morally superior or inferior based on your eating choices."

Evelyn Tribole, MS, RDN, CEDRD-S

What does it mean to be intuitive?

- Rejects the mentality of "dieting" and adopts an "all foods fit" mantra that relies on honoring your hunger cues
- Steps away from the "finish your plate" idea and emphasizes eating until your body is comfortably full
- Helps you check in with yourself before, during, and after a meal by pausing periodically to rate your level of hunger
  - 1 being extremely hungry to 10 being overfull
  - If you are at a level 5 to 6 or are feeling satisfied mid-meal, consider saving the rest of it for later to avoid overeating

What are the benefits of Intuitive eating?

- Regaining our instincts to decide when and how much food our body truly needs
- Being in sync with our hunger cues aid us in choosing more nourishing and satisfying food choices that promote well-being
- Establishes the space for us to better honor our health by the food we choose and allows us to be kind to ourselves when we overindulge
- Promotes the idea that we know what food makes us feel at our best and we should consume what nourishes our body and mind

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Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Examples

Outcomes-Based Program

Remove BMI.

Better
Replace BMI with waist circumference.

Best
Give option to decline/award points for completion, engaging in supportive programs, bloodwork improvements.

Provide Options for Points & Incentives

- Health Education Opportunities
- Wellness Activities
  - Challenges
  - Events

Weight Inclusion in the Workplace

Additional Resources

Books:

The Body is Not An Apology by Sonya Taylor

The Obesity Paradox by Carl Lavie

Anti-Diet by Christy Harrison

Body Kindness by Rebecca Scritchfield

Intuitive Eating 4th ed by Tribole & Resch

Intuitive Eating Workbook by Tribole & Resch

Communities:

Association for Size Diversity & Health

Weight Inclusive Nutrition & Dietetics

Podcasts:

Food Psych, Christy Harrison

Body Kindness, Rebecca Scritchfield

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Questions?