

A MESSAGE FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE LOST WEIGHT

So you've lost some weight and kept it off for a while. Perhaps you worked hard for your weight loss, enduring a restrictive diet or challenging exercise program. Or maybe you lost your weight by skipping one dessert at a time. Regardless, you must be feeling quite proud of yourself and enjoying the attention and praise from others.

Often, when people lose weight they want to tell everyone about their accomplishment. Maybe you feel like you've found the secret—and you want to share it with others. Plus, many of your friends and coworkers may be asking you for advice on how to do what you've done.

The problem with doing this is that there are many factors that influence weight and they are highly individual. While your strategy worked for you, it is unlikely it will work for someone else. Someone could eat exactly what you ate, exercise the same way and in the same amounts, and still end up with completely different results. In fact, odds are they will. After all, you are the statistical anomaly. Research shows that the vast majority of people who lose weight regain it—often with additional pounds.

Think about it this way. Suppose you won the lottery by choosing numbers based on your children's birth years. Would you tell others that if they did the same they, too, could win the lottery? Of course not. You recognize that you beat the odds—the lottery was about chance, not skill.

Weight loss is exactly the same. Oh sure, you may *think* it's different. After all, *everyone knows* that if people just ate less and exercised more they could lose weight. Right?

Wrong!

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While it is commonly believed that losing weight is a simple matter of taking in fewer calories than you burn off in exercise, research shows this just isn't true. It may work on a short-term basis, but the vast majority of people have built in biological compensatory mechanisms that prevent diet and exercise from working in the long-term.

So when you share your weight-loss success with others, you may actually be setting them up to fail, rendering serious physical and emotional harm in the process.

Am I advising you to tell others to give up? Absolutely not. But instead of focusing on the weight, focus on the healthy things you did to get where you are such as taking good care of yourself, eating well, and engaging in regular physical activity. When you support these behaviors, disentangle them from the weight loss. Because the majority of people won't lose weight or, even if they *do* lose weight, it will be temporary. You don't want their feelings of failure on your conscience, do you?

Talking about your weight loss could backfire on you, too. If you happen to gain some weight back, you might feel like you've failed and be tempted to stop your health-promoting behaviors. So it is important that you make life-enhancing choices for yourself regardless of the impact it may have on your weight. Eating healthfully and moving joyfully have health benefits regardless of weight loss.

Please don't promote the belief that if someone is disciplined enough, they can *choose* to be thin. This is not true for the vast majority of people. Many fat people face a great deal of discrimination and stereotyping because of the false belief that weight loss just takes discipline.

If you want to encourage people to exercise without shaming them, say something like: "I feel really good when I run. Want to try it?", rather than saying, "I've lost weight running; maybe you should try it."

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We live in a culture that stigmatizes fatness. Focusing on weight loss continues this misperception and mistreatment of people who are simply a bigger size than this culture says they should be. Please don't be a part of the fat hatred that consumes our society and causes countless eating disorders, body hatred, despair, discrimination, suffering, and misery. Think about the impact of what you say on other people. Everyone deserves to feel good about themselves and enjoy their life, regardless of their size.

You have the opportunity to help people pursue healthy lifestyle choices for the sake of their health and general well being. You also have the opportunity to do a lot of damage. Which route will you choose?

For more information, check out *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* (www.HAESbook.com).

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