

A MESSAGE FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISEASES BLAMED ON THEIR WEIGHT

Maybe you think that if you'd done a better job of controlling your food intake and weight, you wouldn't have diabetes or heart disease or hypertension—or whatever your diagnosis is. But chances are you've tried to diet and manage your weight. Perhaps you shed some pounds that later returned. You wonder why you can't just take better care of yourself.

Stop blaming yourself!

The scientific reality is that genes play a greater role than weight in the development of all diseases associated with weight, including diabetes, atherosclerosis, hypertension, and cancer. We're all born with challenges written into our genetic code; this just happens to be your challenge. Your body is genetically vulnerable to a particular disease(s) and environmental components triggered that genetic propensity. While other people may be able to live a lifestyle that allows them to not pay much attention to how they eat and how active they are, this lifestyle doesn't work as well for you. It's just the way it is, and learning to accept it will bring unexpected benefits into your life.

Your diagnosis woke you up to the fact that your body is having trouble. Now you can rise to the challenge. You can learn how to better manage your health and nourish yourself.

The first step to healing is to let go of those assumptions that stop you from moving on, starting with the idea that you need to lose weight. The value of achieving and maintaining weight loss has long been an unchallenged assumption for so many diseases and you may be surprised to learn that there is very little evidence as to its veracity. In fact, an abundance of evidence suggests the pursuit of

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weight loss is actually harmful, setting us up for physical and emotional difficulties and distracting us from what really matters.

While it is true that some diseases are *associated* with weight, that just means these diseases are more likely to be found in heavier people—not that the weight itself causes the disease. The research that determines these associations rarely considers such factors as fitness, activity, history of dieting, stress, nutrient intake, weight cycling, or socioeconomic status. Yet all play a role.

When studies *do* control for these factors, the increased risk of disease disappears or is significantly reduced. What's likely going on is that some or all of these other factors increase disease risk as well as the risk of weight gain. In other words, there's much more involved in the relationship between weight and disease than weight itself. The role of weight has been misrepresented and exaggerated.

All health indicators, such as blood pressure, cholesterol levels, or blood sugar control, can be improved through lifestyle changes, even without weight loss.

The new paradigm in health care is called Health at Every Size (HAES). HAES encourages you to focus on wellness rather than body size, making changes that more directly affect your health and well-being. HAES helps you focus on what truly matters and allows your body to determine the weight that's best for you.

Can HAES really help me improve my health?

The answer is a resounding YES! HAES has been evaluated in several studies and the results published in well-respected scientific journals. The studies find that HAES is much more effective in improving health than the pursuit of weight loss is. They also show that people enjoy HAES and are much more likely to make it a part of their lives on an ongoing basis than dieting. This enjoyment leads to ongoing changes in eating and exercise behaviors—changes that can last a lifetime.

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Is it really okay to stop trying to lose weight?

It's not only okay—it's the basis of positive change. Living a *Health at Every Size* lifestyle isn't about giving up, it's about moving on.

This commentary was abridged and adapted from the article, "Reclaiming Pleasure in Eating," by Linda Bacon and Judith Matz, *Diabetes Management* magazine, (2010, in press).

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

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