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—Christopher Kennedy Lawford, *New York Times* bestselling author
and former UN Goodwill Ambassador for Drug Treatment and Care

BODY RESPECT



What Conventional Health
Books Get Wrong, Leave Out, and
Just Plain Fail to Understand about Weight

Linda Bacon, PhD, *Author of Health at Every Size.*

Lucy Aphramor, PhD, RD

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CONCLUSION

HAES in Action: Josie's Experience

Consider “Josie’s” path. Josie has a history of dieting, but only recently has begun to understand the logic behind her binge eating. She eats uncontrollably, she realizes, because she has been starving herself every day. That’s called survival! Once she allows herself to eat lunch regularly, she begins to feel more in control, and her “I’m home” binges dwindle. She learns to tune in to her emotions and stop judging them as good or bad. Simply noticing what’s going on for her enables her to take a step back, and she finds this gives her more clarity. Learning to distinguish her emotional needs from actual biological hunger gives her the control around food that proved so elusive in all the years she worked so hard for it by depriving herself. Now, she gets out of her head more when she eats; rather than worrying about calories, fiber, and portions as she used to, she asks herself which taste, texture, or experience she’d like just now, how hungry she is, and how hungry she wants to be after eating. She feels satisfied after the meal and more in control. As Josie gingerly let go of rigid rules in her food choices, other influences like culture, habit, cost, convenience, packaging, occasion, and so on jostled their way in. She realizes that a healthy relationship with food comes from the totality of the experience, and that reducing a meal to its nutrient profile posed a problem, not a solution. Rather than dreading a workout as a duty to be ticked off at the end of the day, she looks forward to a move-to-music class she really enjoys.

If only she’d been taught how to be kind to herself by the first dietitian she saw all those years ago. Imagine—after waiting all these years to lose weight before trying out the adult education

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center, last week Josie ended up going without even knowing what weight she was!

What Josie derives from her new, connected way of being in the world is a sense of agency. She had tried so hard for years to “take responsibility” for her health, but ended up failing. The irony is, now that she has let go of the rules she put in place to help her, she is much more able to give her body what it needs. Given what she now knows about social factors and health, she can also see how misleading the focus on personal responsibility is in the first place.

As she lightens up on food rules and begins to think from new perspectives, Josie also finds herself better able to understand others’ points of view. Seeing size stigma on TV really gets her goat now, whereas before she felt embarrassed for those being insulted and, even more strongly, ashamed of herself. If she happened to be dieting, she felt smug relief, knowing *she* was “doing something about it.” Now, she recognizes how unjust it is to judge others on the basis of what they weigh, and can better resist such harsh judgments against herself. They’re still hard to hear, of course, but she is learning ways to speak kindly to herself and will more often turn to others for support.

It is not a simple switch for anyone, including Josie, to look in the mirror and love what they see, and it doesn’t even mean managing to like your body 24/7. There are times, as when she takes a seat on a crowded bus, when it’s difficult to stay upbeat, because being thin is still so much less demanding than being fat. But at the least, when we go easier on ourselves, it cuts by one (and a very important one) the number of people having a go at us. For Josie, practicing self-care through self-talk and eating to nourish herself adds to her emotional reserves and strengthens her for the challenges and joys of each day. Every week,

Exclusive Excerpt

she's gaining new skills for looking after herself. She notices that even though she's doing more, meeting more people, she has so much more energy and zest. It occurs to her that she no longer avoids social situations where there's food, as it's just not an issue anymore.

Josie and so many of us have spent lifetimes trying to live from the neck up. What we fail to see, while mired in the old paradigm, is the high cost of living this way. Once we take the risk, like Josie, of listening to and valuing our appetites, emotions, and needs—in other words, coming home to our bodies—we enjoy a new sense of clarity. Where once we relied only on intellectual knowledge (or spoken advice), HAES enables us to plot our course with the addition of “embodied” knowledge.

Josie may have come to HAES to lose the weight. But once she embraced HAES, the whole unfolding process has done so much more: She has lost the *burden* of her weight. Josie has suddenly found she feels alive, has clarity, and has also gotten her body back.

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Thanks for checking out

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