



What does the word 'diet' mean to you?

Ditching Dieting – FAQs 1/2

You are calling on people to ditch dieting, what is the alternative?

It's not easy with all the propaganda but daring to find your own appetite, and what works for you, is really the only way to eat sustainably.

Try these five ideas:

- 1) *Eating when you're hungry* – yes, a difficult idea since you might not be used to doing that but it is such a reliable guide and the food tastes so much better;
- 2) *Eating the food you're hungry for* – again, difficult if you have been hemmed in with should and shouldn'ts but it is exciting to find out what you really like and what satisfies you;
- 3) *Tasting every mouthful* – yes, try not to waste the pleasure of eating;
- 4) *Stopping when you're full* – yes, this follows from enjoying and being aware of what you are eating;
- 5) *Finding out why you want to eat when you're not hungry* – yes, see if you are procrastinating or maybe you are sad. Whatever it is, it is worth knowing and the food won't necessarily help you.

Please see our suggested reading list for books on intuitive eating.

How do people know what is a healthy weight for them?

It's hard to know about what weight size is right for oneself because of the extreme pressure coming from visual culture and the diet industry and all those who would have us believe we should be tiny, tinier, tiniest.

If you are consistently eating according to your appetite – eating when you're hungry and stopping when you're full – you will reach a weight that is personal to you. This is not a weight that can be determined with a blunt and discredited tool such as the BMI scale. (According to the BMI scale, George Clooney is obese for example). The BMI does not take into account people's different ages, builds and metabolisms.

Obesity-related conditions are going up and the population is getting heavier and heavier. Isn't it irresponsible and dangerous to be recommending to people that they forget dieting and trying to be healthier?

We believe that troubled eating and the 'obesity epidemic' are both the more visible extremes of a much bigger, everyday phenomena: that we are accepting fear and hatred of our own bodies like gravity, that we are accepting 'I am not good enough' as a fact.

Tragically for us, the obesity crisis is used – and the research often funded by – the industries that can make money from it, such as pharmaceutical and diet industries.

What about people who have conditions which are affected by what they eat, such as diabetes?

We're not suggesting that people don't care for, and pay attention to, their bodies - quite the opposite. Each of us needs to find out how specific foods affect us. If you have diabetes you may need to recognise that certain foods nourish you well and other foods are really damaging. This is all part of finding out what foods work for you.

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Ditching Dieting – FAQs 2/2

What if someone is so heavy that they can't get out of bed? Would you recommend a diet then?

We would suggest that they receive medical treatment and also intensive counselling to support them to tackle the root causes of their over-eating.

Our supermarkets are full of ready meals and other packaged foods that are high in sugar, salt and saturated fat and there is a fast-food outlet on practically every corner. If people are told they can eat what they want they will eat more of these types of food as they are cheap and accessible. Are you saying that this would be healthier than being on a diet?

We think that the food industry, of which the diet industry is a part - Heinz owns Weight Watchers, Unilever owns Slimfast and so on - were to get their house in order so that long life shelf food full of additives and corn sugars were removed, the world would be a better place. We want good food for all, eaten when you are hungry and without fear.

So you're saying people shouldn't eat ready meals? Isn't that like a diet?

We're suggesting that when people pay attention to their food and how it affects their bodies they may choose not to eat foods that have lots of additives and are made for long shelf life. But we don't believe in banning foods. We believe exploring how they affect us if we have permission to eat them, rather than dismissing them and then lusting guiltily, is a saner way to go and what will fit well with our bodies.

Traditional diet clubs are based around sensible eating guidelines, such as having a balanced diet and eating lots of fruit and vegetables. Surely this type of sensible eating is a good idea?

95% of diets fail – the vast majority of people regain the weight they lost and then some. If dieting worked, why would we need to do it more than once? These diet clubs don't teach us how to respond to our appetites and how to pay attention to, and satisfy, internal cues. They provide support yes, but on the basis that we must control ourselves. Diets interfere with our metabolism and the feelings of deprivation result in a binge/diet cycle. This yo-yo dieting has proved to be more harmful to our health than being 'overweight'.

SUGGESTED READING:

The obesity 'epidemic':

'Obesity Myth' by Paul Campos

'Fat Politics' by J. Eric Oliver

Intuitive eating:

'Beyond Chocolate' by Audrey and Sophie Boss

'Overcoming Over-Eating' by Jane Hirschmann & Carol Munter

'On Eating' by Susie Orbach

'Fat is a Feminist Issue' by Susie Orbach

'When Food Is Love' by Geneen Roth