

Mixed Messages Part II: Women, Weight Loss, & The Struggle for Self-Acceptance

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(this is Part II of a two-part blog)



We've all heard it by men and women alike, and maybe even we ourselves have said it: "You look great! Are you on a diet right now?" It may be the woman you're commenting on her new slimness is on the newest fad diet, and from the looks of it, it works, and feels good, doesn't it? Well: yes and no. Sure, women may lose weight on the latest diet craze - any "diet" that requires you to eat way less, something very specific, and low in types of food our bodies need - but more often than not, the weight, over time, yo-yos. Celebrities are often culprits of this, and paparazzi papers love to show the "before" and "now" pics in the checkout aisle. Oprah - one the most influential role models for females for generations - has herself been the brunt of this kind of gossip and yo-yo-ing. When we think of the word "diet," this is the kind of thing we most often have in our head: a temporary thing.

Yet this isn't what "diet" means at all.

We've seen the yo-yo weight phenomenon not only in celebrities but in our colleagues and family. Fad "diet" after fad "diet" that essentially consists of starving yourself certain foods you need, is, in this writer's opinion, not sustainable nor healthy. Because what happens? Once you reach your desired weight, you "go off" your diet, and then gain all that weight back.

There's something wrong about this kind of thinking about food. And it starts with our understanding of "diet."

So what is a diet, then?

A diet, according to the Cambridge English Dictionary Online, is simply "the food and drink usually taken by a person or group." Period. This is the primary meaning of the word diet, and it holds no ethical, moral, or judgment whatsoever: a diet is what we consume.

But in the dictionary, unfortunately, there's the secondary meaning, too. When women decide to "go on a diet," they are succumbing to that "other" kind of diet. The ones where you go completely off carbs, or solid foods twice a day, or eat cereal all day long, in order to lose weight. And you notice: it's working! But how long will that be the case?

At first it feels great to hear these compliments. But then the backhanded compliment dawns on you: does that mean, then, I didn't look good before? After then getting "off" the diet, the weight inevitably comes all back, you feel unattractive again, don't get those compliments, and you imagine people sniggering behind your back.

This is exactly the kind of thinking and insecurity that leads one to eat poorly in the first place. It's time we start thinking diet, then, as not something we go "on" or "off," but one that we eat all the time (with exceptions, of course). If we do that, then maybe the

thought of eating healthy - not "denying," but adding healthy food - will not only be more sustainable, you'll actually feel better about yourself no matter how much weight you have.

In order to eat more healthy, we must change our mindset about what you are undertaking. This is a life decision that requires time and resilience, but it's also more meaningful. It's no longer about looking "thin," but about feeling energized, good, rested, motivated, and yes: good about yourself.

So. OK. We're in it to win it. Let's get prepped for this. Remember: there's no "golden bullet" to eating healthy and losing weight. Because of this, below are a few preliminary projects to do while you set out on your new life!

- **Change Your Thinking:** Food does serve many purposes, it's true. Try, though, to think of food the way our ancestors did: *food as fuel*. It's there to give you life! Energy! Changing this perception takes time and getting excited about the healthy changes you want to make. Avoid the fad diets. Even though we won't *always* eat healthy, your thinking must remain positive and proactive. If you "slip," and have a large pizza by yourself one night, don't either let it turn into a domino effect where you slip back into old habits nor make you feel guilty. It's ok. Slipping's part of the process. Accept it and continue. Acceptance of who you are is a huge part of health and happiness.
- **Research:** Many of us don't know what *kinds* of foods are healthy, what quantities we should be eating, what combinations are best, what different bodies require, and so on. It's a lot! That's ok. Consult medical websites, nutritional sites and cookbooks, and take time to learn what your body needs. It takes some jiggering and cravings are always the little demon on your shoulder making you think you *need* that doughnut. Once you start changing your diet, though it may

be difficult at first, you'd be surprised how much smaller portion size you really DO need as fuel!

- **Be Patient:** Breaking bad eating habits and bad relationships towards food requires repetition and time. You may not see results for a while. That's natural. But you might just *feel* better. Isn't that, after all, the main point? The better you feel, the better you feel about yourself. The more energy you have, the more determination grows and blossoms into exercise, doing projects you've always put off, and finding within yourself a growing self-confidence that glows. People will notice. It's attractive because you yourself find yourself worth something!
- **One Step at a Time:** Ok, not to sound like an AA meeting or anything, but don't think too far ahead. Introduce healthy dinners along with some staple dinners. Again: it's ok. Slowly, though, see if you can change those go-to dinners into healthy ones. How does this start? a) with grocery shopping, for one. What you choose to buy is extremely important, and then b) the restaurant. Trouble, here. You need to be strong sometimes in what you order, where to go, and how much of the portion you eat. Yes, that's right. Remember restaurants aren't in the business of helping you change your eating patterns. To many consumers, they don't feel they're getting a good deal if those garlic mashed potatoes come on the plate the size of a New Mexico mesa. Portion size is waaay out of control today. Just because it's plunked on the plate doesn't mean you have to finish it.
- **Don't Lose Hope:** There will be times you'll feel defeated, even more insecure, not seeing or feeling results or a host of other feelings that block your way to changing how you eat. Go easy on yourself. This is normal (have we said these things enough? It's because we're so hard on ourselves, we need to keep reminding us of how progress works!). Don't let these thoughts overtake you!
- **Find a Friend To Do it With You:** You'd be surprised how having someone else to encourage and keep you going can help. It's also an excellent idea, when you're ready, to have a friend as an exercise partner. It'll getcha out of bed!

If you take these non-magic bullet approaches to eating and diet, if you remain persistent, if you remain motivated, chances are good you'll feel something more than merely dieting and losing weight. You'll start to feel...YOU!

You are unique, special, and your body is an amazing instrument. Learn to love it and yourself a little bit more. Regardless of your weight, if not at health-risk levels, how you feel about yourself is more important than the size of your dress.

References

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