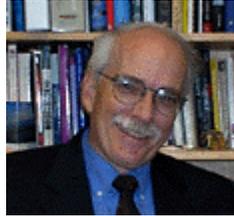




A Parent's Guide to Student Bodies

Dear Parents,

This newsletter is included as part of *Student Bodies*, a program being offered to your daughter at her school. *Student Bodies* is designed to teach young women how to maintain their weight through healthy eating and exercise, challenge the myth that “thinness equals happiness,” like and accept their bodies, and identify self-esteem and happiness through many activities in their lives.



Many parents find it difficult to deal with their daughters' weight/shape and appearance issues. If you think your daughter should lose weight, how do you tell her without being critical? And how do you decide if she should lose weight? Or maybe her weight is fine but she still goes from one diet to another and is obsessed about gaining weight? Should you worry? Is she exercising too much? How do you know if she has an eating disorder? If you suspect that she does, what should you do?

We know the following from scientific research:

- Weight and shape concerns are very common among adolescents and can sometimes lead to eating disorders
- Even students who are comfortable with their weight and shape struggle with other issues of appearance
- The best way to lose weight or maintain your weight is through careful eating and exercise
- Criticism and teasing about weight and shape—is harmful

We address these and related issues in this newsletter. We know that these concerns are common for high school girls and we have included input from parents of high school students. To help you think about these issues, begin by taking the brief self-quiz on the following page.

C. Barr Taylor, M.D.
Professor of Psychiatry
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A Note From Ms. Garrett

What parent of an adolescent hasn't had to deal with concerns about their daughter's body image? Where and how did your daughter develop her own body image? One of the most wonderful outcomes of our work with Stanford University is the broad based parent component that has been developed to help parents become more knowledgeable in what to say to their daughter when she expresses concern over the way she looks. As you know, body image is a family issue. Eating disorders are a family issue. Getting help with knowing the best way to handle your daughter's concerns about the way she looks is important to the partnership we have with you as parents. Parents and teachers alike can have a huge influence on your daughter's body image, both positive and negative. Please participate in the continued joint effort to use what influence we have to help your daughter grow into her body with pride and a healthy view of her physical self.

Dina Garrett
Vice Principal
Student Services
Presentation High School

Self-Quiz: What Messages Are You Sending Your Daughter About Weight and Shape?

1. Do you tease your daughter about her weight and shape? Yes _____ No _____
2. Do you make critical comments about your daughter’s weight or shape? Yes _____ No _____
3. Do you make positive comments about a friend’s or celebrity’s weight or shape? Yes _____ No _____
4. Do you make unflattering comments or jokes about other people’s weight or shape? Yes _____ No _____
5. Do you talk about your own need to lose weight or make negative comments about your own size and shape (for example your stomach or thighs being too large or flabby)? Yes _____ No _____
6. Do you comment on women’s figures? Yes _____ No _____
7. Do you comment on or try to control what your daughter eats in an attempt to help her lose weight? Yes _____ No _____

If you answered “no” to every question...

By not making comments on your own or others' weight and shape, you are helping your daughter develop a healthy body image. It is likely that you already understand that commenting on other women's bodies can lead your daughter to develop an unhealthy body image. Please read on the following page some of the negative consequences of messages that your daughter may be receiving from others, including the media.

If you answered “yes” to any of the questions...

You may be surprised to learn that some of your behavior may encourage your daughter to adopt unhealthy attitudes about her weight and shape. Sometimes, comments we make in front of our daughters can have unintentional and even dramatic consequences. For example, women who learn from their parents (and the media) to place a high value on being thin are at greater risk of developing an eating disorder. Many women with eating disorders report that their parents put them on their first diet. Please read on the following page some of the negative consequences of the messages you may be unintentionally sending.

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What Are the Negative Consequences of the Messages You May Be Sending?

Comments about yourself

Many parents are surprised to learn that their children mimic their self-critical statements. Even casual comments can be taken seriously. What you say about your figure sets a tone for how important you believe having a certain figure is to having a good life and what is an acceptable range of weight and shape. It is important that your daughter see you accepting your shape even if you don't accept your body 100% of the time.

Comments about or control of food

It is your responsibility to provide your daughter with healthy foods and to teach her how to make healthy food choices. There is, however, a difference between providing healthy foods and forcing a diet on your daughter. Too often we have seen women with eating disorders tell us that their mother was the first to put them on a diet and comment on the amounts of food they consumed. Unless your daughter is overweight and has been advised by her health care provider to lose weight, encouraging her to do so may result in unhealthy eating-related behaviors.

Teasing

Even though you may think teasing or joking about your daughter's weight or shape is harmless, these comments can be devastating to your daughter's self-esteem. Remember that the things you say have much greater impact on her views about her appearance than you might think. Sometimes the messages we assume will be interpreted as "teasing" are easily misunderstood.

Critical comments about your daughter

Sometimes parents hope that making critical comments will motivate their children to change their behavior (e.g., eat better, exercise more, change their outfit). Unfortunately, this rarely works. Critical comments, like teasing, can be devastating to your daughter's self-esteem. Remember that the things you say significantly impact your daughter's views about her appearance.

Comments about others

Judging other people by their weight, shape or appearance teaches your child your beliefs about the importance of these physical attributes. When you appear to place a great amount of importance on weight or shape, your daughter will think that others will value HER for her appearance. Instead of commenting on another's appearance, try to focus on the positive attributes of that person. Of course, this doesn't mean you have to ignore physical features. For example, if a friend has been successful in losing weight, it makes sense to comment on it. What is important is that you don't subtly convey the message that a person's worth is based on his/her appearance.

A Note To Dads

When our daughters are in high school and are very busy with their many activities and friends, we sometimes think that we have a less important role in their lives than when they were younger. In our studies we have found that daughters remain very attentive to what their fathers say—off-hand negative comments or teasing about weight or looks from their dads can have a very strong impact in making them feel bad about themselves. Even healthy behaviors on your part (e.g., exercise and attentiveness to your own fitness) can become a sore spot for your daughter if she feels criticized for not being fit (and by extension, unattractive). So please take some time to carefully consider the issues we discuss here.

What Messages Might You Be Sending to Your Daughter?

Often there is a difference between what we say and what others hear. This difference may result from the speaker not communicating clearly or the listener not listening carefully. Sometimes the miscommunication results in the listener "hearing" an unintended message without the speaker ever knowing that the listener misunderstood (see communication chain below). How this relates to the messages your daughter receives is simple. You may intend to offer support or clear advice (e.g., "Eat a healthy diet."), but your daughter may "hear" rejection or criticism. Even with the best of intentions, some of your comments and actions may contribute to your daughter feeling critical of her body and eating habits. As you read the following scenarios, ask yourself if you have ever said any of these things and consider whether your daughter may have misunderstood your intentions.

Communication Chain



Social Implications

Mom thinks: "I am afraid that if my daughter doesn't lose weight she will miss out on important social opportunities."

Mom Says:

"I think my daughter would feel better about herself if she lost a few pounds. I'm afraid that she feels self-conscious around her friends. The other day I told her, 'Don't you think you would feel better if you lost a little weight? You'd look great!'"

Daughter Hears:

"Mom doesn't think I'm okay the way I look. I guess losing a few pounds would probably make me feel better. Maybe others will think I'm cuter and more fun to be around."

Take Home Message:

Teach your daughter to build her self-esteem on characteristics other than physical appearance. Remind her what makes her a unique and wonderful individual.

Can Compliments Lead To Chronic Dieting?

Dad thinks: "My daughter recently lost weight and looks better. I am so proud of her."

Dad Says:

"My daughter recently lost weight and she looks better now. I'd be happy if she maintained this. I complimented her and said, 'Wow, you've lost weight, you look great!'"

Daughter Hears:

"I look good now, I guess I didn't look good before. I better continue dieting so that I maintain what I lost. If I lose more weight I'll get even more compliments."

Take Home Message:

Dieting can become extreme and chronic, especially when excessive compliments for weight loss are received. Chronic dieting is thought to increase the risk for eating disorders. Developing a fear of fat or gaining weight may develop that, when extreme, can be a symptom of an eating disorder.

Choosing Healthy Foods

Dad thinks: "I am concerned about my daughter's eating habits and I want to help her choose the right foods."

Dad Says:

"If my daughter keeps up her eating habits, she's surely going to gain weight. So I said to her, 'You really shouldn't eat that.'"

Daughter Hears:

"Dad is monitoring everything I eat. I guess it's not okay for me to eat what I want. I have to start paying attention to everything I eat."

Take Home Message:

Thoughts such as these can lead to extreme dieting, unhealthy eating habits and binge eating episodes. When people think that it is not okay to eat certain foods, they are more likely to binge on them later.

Role Model

Mom thinks: "I feel bad about my own body and I wish that I could lose weight."

Mom Says:

"I feel bad about my own body. I wish I could lose some weight. Sometimes I make comments in front of my daughter like, 'Yikes, look at my thighs, I can't wear this!' or 'I can't be seen in this bathing suit!'"

Daughter hears:

"If my mom thinks she's fat, she probably thinks I am fat too. I don't look perfect in my clothes either. I should try to go on a diet."

Take Home Message:

As a parent you are a role model and what you say and think are often mirrored by your children. If you make comments about your body around your daughter she likely will learn to always be dissatisfied with her body.

Forbidden Foods

Mom thinks: "I was overweight when I was younger and I don't want my daughter to have the same problems that I had."

Mom Says:

"I was overweight when I was younger and I don't want my daughter to have the same problem. I'm going to try to prevent her from gaining weight by buying non fat or low fat products only."

Daughter hears:

"My parents think I'm fat and they want to control what I eat. If I want something that isn't low fat I'll have to sneak it."

Take Home Message:

Even if you are just trying to help your daughter, sending her these subtle hints about eating diet food may cause resentment. She also may do just the opposite. When certain foods are designated as "forbidden," a common practice in dieting, people tend to be more likely to binge on those foods later.



Helpful Hints For Communicating With Your Daughter

DO...

Do encourage healthy exercise and nutrition habits

It is important for you to help your daughter learn about the necessity of healthy nutrition and healthy weight regulation. Healthy weight regulation includes eating:

- 3 meals a day at regular intervals
- A low-fat diet (less than 30% calories from fat)
- A variety of different foods
- A minimum of 1,500 calories daily

Do teach your family not to tease

Try to be a good role model at home. Encourage your kids not to tease each other about weight or shape, as these types of comments can be extremely hurtful and can affect your daughter's self-image. Even if a family member is "only joking," remember that these comments can bother your daughter. A good way to deal with these things is to practice what you can say to your children. For instance, one child says to another, "You're as big as a barn!" Your reply might be, "I don't want you saying those kinds of things. Saying that is hurtful and it won't be tolerated in this house."

Do educate yourself and your children about the consequences of dieting

We know that there are many different definitions of dieting. When we talk about dieting, we are not talking about healthy eating practices or a "healthy diet." By "dieting" we mean:

- Missing meals or eating less than 1500 calories per day
- Skipping meals to lose weight or severely restricting food intake
- Restricting diet to only certain types of food or limited types of food (e.g. grapefruit, cottage cheese)

Help educate your daughter about what "dieting" means and about the consequences of dieting to lose weight. In the long run, diets simply don't work. Let your daughter know that it is unhealthy to diet and that it is important for her to get proper nutrition.

DON'T...

Don't tease

Do not make critical comments or tease your daughter about her weight, shape or appearance and disallow teasing in the home. This may be the most important thing you can do for your daughter. Even though you may think teasing or joking about your daughter's weight or shape is harmless, these comments can be devastating to your daughter's self-esteem. Remember that the things you say have much greater impact on her views about her appearance than you might think.



Don't encourage dieting

Unless your daughter has a medical condition that requires her to lose weight, you should not encourage her to diet. The majority of teenagers do not need to lose weight. Instead, encourage healthy dietary practices in the home and try to get the family involved in healthy activities and regular exercise. You can take a family bike trip, walk or hike as a way to get the family active together.

Don't complain about your own body

Your attitude about your weight and shape is extremely important. It is important that your daughter be able to see you accepting your shape and modeling qualities of self-acceptance. Remember that you are her role model and if you like yourself the way you are, she will learn to like herself the way she is. Try not to complain about your body or your appearance in front of her and encourage her to accept her body.

DO...**Do emphasize your daughter's positive qualities and talents**

Make an effort to support your daughter's talents, skills and interests. Show her through your support and reinforcement that her value is not based on her weight or shape, but on internal qualities.

- Emphasize the importance of values in life other than appearance
- Support her by attending her events, commenting on her positive qualities, noticing her extra efforts, etc.

Do challenge the idea that only "thin is beautiful"

Talk to your daughter about how magazines, advertisements and TV portray images of women that suggest that thin is beautiful. This body image ideal is unrealistic and unhealthy. Discuss with her:

- How magazines, advertisements and TV tend to select women whose body shapes are much thinner and taller than most women
- How magazines retouch and edit photos of most every model to create an unrealistic body weight and shape
- That advertisements, magazines and TV often suggest that thin equals happy

Do act as a positive role model

- Try to convey a healthy message by eating healthy, not dieting, and staying active
- Make positive comments about others, refrain from judging others by their weight and shape
- Talk to and listen to your daughter

DON'T...**Don't make critical comments**

Judging other people by their weight, shape or appearance is not the kind of example you want to set for your daughter. By placing so much importance on weight or shape, your daughter will think that others will value HER for her appearance. Instead of judging or criticizing, try to focus on the positive attributes of that person and talk about other qualities besides appearance.

Don't label foods as "forbidden"

It is important that you keep an open mind and try not to discourage your daughter from eating certain foods. Remember that adolescents need a variety of different nutrients to keep them growing and strong. Try not to label certain foods as "bad" or "good" but to encourage healthy eating. There is nothing inherently good or bad about any foods. The key to a healthy diet is variety and moderation in order to get a wide variety of nutrients and vitamins.

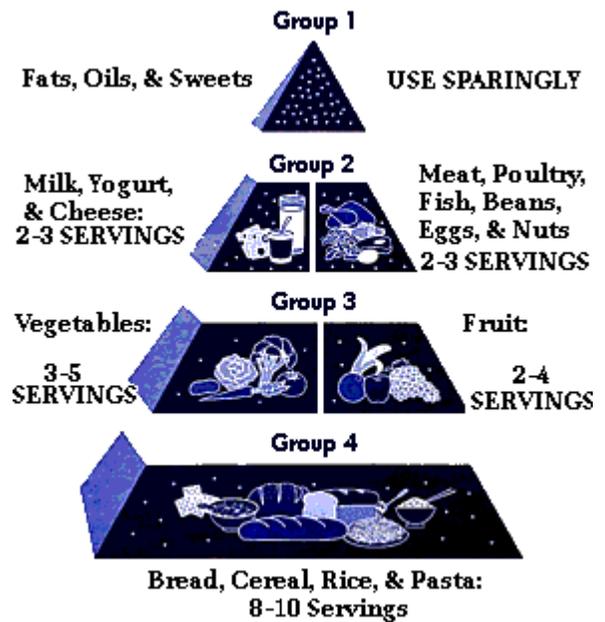


What Is a Diet?

Diets are temporary changes in what you eat designed to produce weight loss. Changes can include reducing the overall amount of food you eat (e.g., calorie reduction below 1,500 calories a day), skipping or delaying meals, or avoiding certain types of foods. Diets are not lifestyle changes and they would not be healthy to maintain on a permanent basis. Dieting is known to be one of the most powerful triggers for developing an eating disorder in both men and women.

Dieting tips are everywhere -- on TV, on the Internet, in newspapers and magazines. And all the advertisements make it look fast and easy to achieve (see example). But can anything really be that simple? The stories and pictures provided in the ads make dieting appealing but the advertisers milk the myth that, with thinness, comes beauty and success. How realistic is it that you can lose 30 lbs. in one month AND get toned muscles by chewing gum AND still be able to eat without restraint.

USDA Food Pyramid



Common Reasons Why Young Women Go On Diets

What They Say

- All my friends are on a diet, especially the most popular ones
- I am fat
- I need to look great for a social event
- I need something about myself I can control

What They Really Mean

- I am lonely and want to belong
- I feel bad about myself and I would like myself more if I were thinner
- I feel insecure about being seen at a social event and want to make sure I look perfect
- I feel out of control in my life and need something I can control

Why Diets Don't Work

The majority (95% to 98%) of all diets fail with people regaining the weight (and in many cases additional weight) within one to five years. Reasons why this happens are complex but the primary reason is that people cannot sustain the diet and often stop the diet and resume eating more calories. That is, the diet does not become a part of the person's lifestyle. Unfortunately, regular dieting can have long-term effects on the body's metabolism.

If the point of a diet is to lose weight, why do many people regain the weight once they stop dieting? Dieting has a variety of effects on the body and the mind that contribute to the phenomenon of post-diet weight gain.



A diet of less than 1000-1200 calories a day can cause a state of semi-starvation and force the body to conserve calories by lowering its overall metabolism. In an attempt to survive, the body will cut back its caloric needs leaving the person with less energy. Even though a person may start eating a normal diet again, the lowered metabolism may be sustained for as long as one year. Thus, a normalized caloric intake will not instantly result in an improved body state but the energy will be stored for upcoming "emergency situations." Irregular eating patterns also can confuse the body's sensation of satiety, which can lead to overeating and binge eating.

Most young women like to dress up and look nice for special occasions. Some even start "working towards" an event by starting a diet to fit into special clothing. It usually feels great to have achieved the goal of looking good, feeling accepted or even admired by others. Crash diets can allow you to lose weight quickly, but often result in weight gain shortly after returning to the previous lifestyle and nutrition habits. If you are like most people, you probably have had a similar experience.

Dieting To Extremes

Many women engage in compulsive dieting and exercise patterns in order to lose weight or maintain an unnaturally low weight. As many as two in five female college students regularly engage in unhealthy weight loss strategies.

Unhealthy weight-loss strategies include:

- Skipping meals
- Putting off eating until very late in the day
- Fasting
- Eating only empty calories like diet soda to create a feeling of fullness
- Using nicotine or appetite suppressants to mask feelings of hunger

Symptoms of undereating:

If you've ever been on a diet, you've probably noticed some physical consequences that occur as your body responds to the change in food consumption. Have you ever noticed any of the following:

- Getting tired more easily?
- Feeling sluggish during physical activity?
- Having trouble staying focused on your homework or pleasure reading?
- Getting cold more easily?
- Feeling down or irritated?

Diet Advertisement in Popular Women's Magazine

Weight Loss

Hollywood's new diet phenomenon

Lose up to 10 lbs this weekend!

The Hollywood "Miracle" diet features delicious, all-natural juices that help you lose weight while you cleanse, detoxify and rejuvenate your body.

Fad Diets, Diet Pills and Diet Supplements

Fad diets, diet pills, and extreme exercise are often used as weight loss strategies, but these methods are unhealthy. Fad diets, another term for crash diets, typically involve a drastic reduction in caloric intake with the goal of rapid weight reduction. There are a number of fad diets, each having its own theory about why it works. However, the main reason for weight loss caused by following these diets is the drastic reduction in calories. Common fad diets include:

- The All Protein Diet
- The Grapefruit Diet
- The Juice/Broth Diet
- The Food Combining Diet (eating starches and proteins separately in order to eliminate weight gain)



Some weight may be lost by adhering to these diets, but weight loss usually is followed by weight gain once normal eating is resumed. The pattern of repeated ups and downs in weight resulting from crash dieting is called the yo-yo effect and can lead to the development of binge eating patterns.

Diet pills are also ineffective for long-term weight loss. Diet pills or weight-loss drugs include, but are not limited to:

- Laxatives
- Herbal preparations
- Amphetamines
- Appetite suppressants



Weight loss drugs can have serious side effects ranging from light-headedness to heart attack or sudden death. To learn more about the history of weight loss drugs and their effects, please refer to the resources listed at the end of this newsletter.

Once again, diet supplements appear to be ineffective for long-term weight loss. However, they seem to be growing in popularity with increased media attention being paid to a fit and healthy lifestyle as well as the increasing number of health food stores. Moreover, diet supplements can be extremely dangerous. According to the FDA, a diet supplement is any product intended for ingestion as a diet addition. However, the FDA does not regulate the use and marketing of diet supplements as stringently as it does other products (i.e. drugs or food additives). This means it is up to the consumers and manufacturers to determine the truthfulness of label claims as well as the safety of the product.

In addition, once a diet supplement has been marketed, the FDA has to demonstrate that it is unsafe before restricting the product's use. Unfortunately, this usually occurs after consumers become ill or even die. Moreover, according to the FDA, nutritionists agree that diet supplements are not to be used as a replacement of traditional food plans because they do not provide all of the known nutritional benefits of conventional foods.



It may seem that fad diets, diet pills, or diet supplements are quick and easy methods to lose weight, but remember the benefits rarely, if ever, outweigh the negative long-term effects. High school students may be prone to try losing weight quickly around specific events including dances and the prom. If you notice your daughter trying to lose weight to look good for a social event, or to fit into a prom dress, make sure you talk to her about the ill consequences of trying to lose too much weight too quickly. Instead, talk with your daughter and work together to find ways for her to feel comfortable with herself (e.g., help her find an outfit that flatters her current shape and weight).

Why Exercise?

When most people think about the value of exercise, they focus primarily on benefits to physical appearance. Indeed, regular exercise (i.e., 30 to 50 minutes of aerobic activity, 3 to 5 times per week) is one of the best ways to manage weight over time. Exercise contributes to a healthier distribution of body fat and muscle (i.e., a better toned body), greater muscular strength and endurance, improved flexibility and agility, greater skill and grace of body movement, and improved cardiovascular fitness.

Regular exercise makes people less vulnerable to stress and boosts self-confidence and self-esteem. Participation in organized sports can have the added benefit of aiding in the development of abilities and skills that can be used in later life (not to mention the ability to handle healthy competition).

Scientists have found that young women who engage in regular exercise are less likely to develop eating disorders.

What can you do to help? Regular exercise is like any other habit -- it builds gradually over time.

- Model healthy behavior for your daughter by participating in your own physical exercise
- Encourage exercise through healthy family activities such as walking, hiking, or bike riding.



What To Do When Overweight Is a Concern

This is a very tough question to answer. Research shows that more and more American teenagers (following the trend for American adults) are overweight - an astounding 25-30% of teenagers. We know that dieting (i.e., following a restricted calorie intake that is not sustainable over time) does not produce permanent weight loss and can, in the process, be very damaging to self-esteem. What can and should parents do, then, to support (and possibly even encourage) their overweight daughters to better manage their weight?

In answering this question it is best to consider what factors are most likely responsible for your daughter's weight problems. More often than not, the gradual development of unhealthy habits (e.g., eating a nutritionally poor diet, frequent snacking and/or skipping meals, inactivity) is a key set-up for weight gain. In addition, scientific evidence clearly indicates that biological predisposition plays a significant role in determining a person's weight (whether low or high). Experts agree that the best path to achieving a healthy weight is the development of healthy dietary practices involving a balanced, low-fat diet and regular exercise. There are no short-cuts to this process.

While the statistics on overweight teens is alarming, be aware that 70 to 75% of teenagers are not overweight. Further, the majority of teens who diet do not need to lose weight. In general, we do not recommend that you encourage your daughter to lose weight unless you have received this recommendation from your health care provider. Remember, there is a difference between being at a healthy weight and being considered "thin" by current cultural standards.

Whether or not your daughter is deemed medically overweight, we believe that parents can and should play a vital role in teaching their children healthy habits. Encourage your daughter to eat regularly. Help your daughter to develop healthy dietary practices by making sure she has healthy foods at home. *Student Bodies* will teach your daughter what is included in a healthy diet. Talk to your daughter about what she is learning about a healthy diet and exercise plan. If she is interested, exercise or cook with her. The good news is that if your daughter follows a healthy diet and exercises regularly, she is likely to attain a healthy weight.

Why Do Young Women Develop Eating Disorders?

You may have wondered why some young women develop eating disorders. Eating disorders are most likely to occur among women living in cultures and subcultures that emphasize thinness as a standard for beauty. We know that unhealthy efforts at dieting are a frequent precursor to the development of eating disorders. Overly restrictive diets, which can make a person feel ravenous, can set the stage for a repetitive cycle of eating large amounts of food while feeling out of control (i.e., binge eating) followed by wanting to get rid of the food (e.g., vomiting, laxatives, diet pills, extreme exercising). However, the reasons why any particular young woman develops an eating disorder are complex. In addition to the hope of weight loss, young women embark on diets for a variety of reasons. For example, dieting can be used as a strategy to achieve “self-control.” Further, dieting also can become a predictable and reassuring activity to focus on when a young woman feels overwhelmed by increasingly complex social and emotional challenges

in her life. The risk of developing an eating disorder becomes greatly elevated if a young woman who is dieting in an unhealthy manner bases her self esteem on her appearance (e.g., weighing an unrealistic amount and looking a certain way).

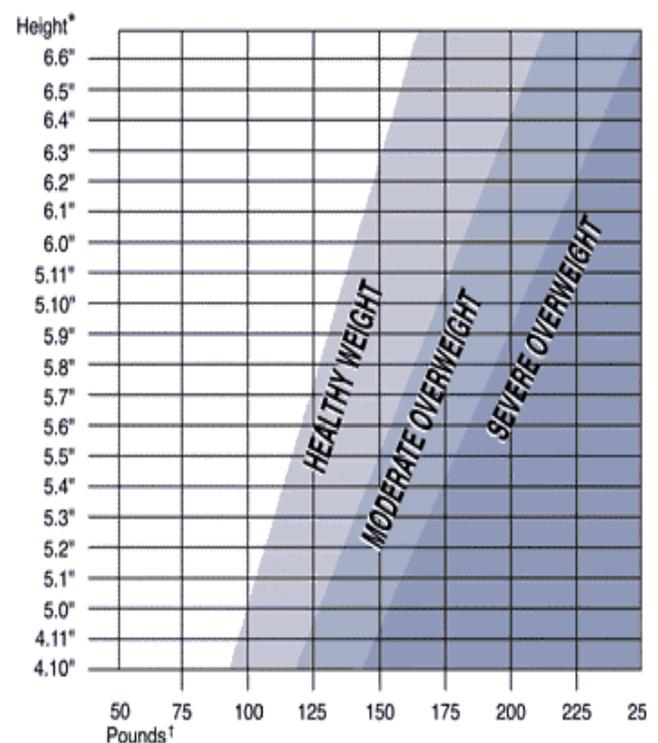
Student Bodies is designed to teach young women how to maintain their weight through healthy eating and exercise, to challenge the myth that “thinness equals happiness,” to help them like and accept their bodies, and to find self-esteem and happiness through many activities in their lives. As a parent, we know you want your daughter to be happy and successful. In this culture, it can be extremely difficult not to equate thinness with happiness and many parents inadvertently put pressure on their children to be thin. The truth is, the unrelenting pressure that young women receive from others (e.g., friends, media, family) as well as from themselves to lose weight can cause great unhappiness.

What Are Eating Disorders?

Anorexia

Anorexia is a relatively uncommon (about 1% of the population) but serious disorder. Between 5% and 18% of women with anorexia die from the disorder. Women with anorexia often become preoccupied with their shape. For example, it is common for a woman with anorexia to believe that her body is too fat and weigh herself many times a day or closely examine her body in the mirror, obsessively scrutinizing her body for any evidence of fat or other changes in shape. This occurs despite the fact that these women, by definition, are extremely underweight.

To meet the clinically defined weight criteria for anorexia nervosa, a woman must be at least 15% below her expected weight and have missed at least three consecutive menstrual periods. However, a woman can suffer from an eating disorder, be underweight and have medical complications without meeting these exact criteria.



Women with anorexia also tend to strictly categorize food as either "good" or "bad." All eating becomes a highly emotional experience. If she eats only "good foods" she will feel "virtuous" and "pure" but will feel like a failure and guilty if she eats any "bad" or "forbidden" foods. They frequently believe that an ideal body will bring them happiness and success. They often are secretive about eating, are perfectionistic and achievement oriented, and usually began dieting as an adolescent. Furthermore, these rigid and restrictive eating habits can result in binge eating and purging. Anorexia can be very difficult to treat because a woman with anorexia often denies she has a problem. In fact, she usually feels proud of her ability to control her appetite, caloric consumption and body weight. She may believe that by controlling her body shape she is controlling her life as well.



Bulimia

Although as many as 1 in 5 young women will occasionally binge and purge, approximately 2% will develop the full bulimia nervosa syndrome. Bulimia nervosa is characterized by episodes of binge eating followed by various forms of purging (most commonly self-induced vomiting, but also laxative, diuretic use and extreme exercise). An episode of binge eating is one in which the individual, feeling out of control, consumes (or believes she has consumed) an excessive amount of food. Self-loathing, disgust, guilt, or anxiety about possible weight gain often follows the binge. Binge eating can be triggered by strong emotions such as overwhelming anxiety or sadness in response to violating dietary rules (e.g., after eating "forbidden" foods). In the case of bulimia, binge eating typically is followed by purging.

Purging is often perceived as a way of regaining control after overeating, a way of erasing the caloric damage of a binge, of preventing the feared weight gain from a binge. The most common form of purging is self-induced vomiting. Ironically, vomiting actually results in the person having less control. This is

because vomiting promotes heightened sensitivity to feelings of fullness. Over time, a woman may feel disgustingly full and feel the need to throw up after eating smaller and smaller amounts of food. The person gets caught in a vicious purging cycle that is difficult to break. The immediate sense of relief produced by vomiting can encourage binge eating because of the mistaken belief that vomiting "gets rid of" the calories consumed during a binge. In spite of how it appears, vomiting is actually not effective at ridding the body of all the calories consumed during a binge and does not result in the expected weight loss. In fact, most women with bulimia are of average weight.

Another common form of purging is the use of laxatives and diuretics. These drugs are dangerous because they interfere with the body's mechanisms for absorbing water and salts. Regular use of diuretics and laxatives can lead to dehydration, a potentially fatal complication. Neither the use of laxatives nor diuretics lead to permanent weight loss. Laxatives and diuretics can appear to cause weight loss because they prevent absorption of water.

Binge Eating Disorder

Even though binge eating disorder only recently has been recognized as a distinct condition, it is likely the most commonly occurring eating disorder in the population. Many people with binge eating disorder are overweight, but individuals of average weight also can suffer from the disorder. The prevalence of binge eating disorder is thought to be approximately 2 percent of adults (or 1-2 million Americans). The key feature of binge eating disorder is the consumption of unusually large amounts of food accompanied by a feeling of “loss of control” over what or how much food is eaten. During a binge eating episode, food often is eaten more rapidly than usual and may be consumed in secret due to embarrassment or shame over the amount of food consumed. Unlike bulimia nervosa, binge eating occurs in the absence of purging (e.g., self-induced vomiting, laxatives, diuretics, etc.). Individuals with binge eating disorder frequently report a history of childhood weight-related teasing and criticism and lifetime dieting and weight management problems. Like the other eating disorders, individuals with binge eating disorder tend to evaluate their self-worth, to a significant degree, on the basis of their shape and weight.

What To Do If You Think Your Daughter Has an Eating Disorder

- If you think that your daughter has an eating disorder, seek professional advice as soon as possible.
- Communicate your concern without criticism.
- Try not to be confrontational, it will put your daughter on the defensive.
- Before you approach your daughter, practice and consider how she may respond.

Helpful Hints For Talking With Your Daughter

There is no “best” time and place to talk to your daughter about these issues. As with all important life lessons (e.g., alcohol/drug use, violence, etc.), it is important that you have multiple conversations with your daughter over time. Use triggers such as television shows, magazine articles, or comments your daughter makes to start the conversation on the importance of beauty and thinness. It is important that in your conversations you listen to your daughter as much as you talk. Ask your daughter to discuss her experiences and concerns. Ask her what her friends think (this will give you information on her thoughts as well).

Talk to her about your experiences as a teenager. Comment on media messages. Of course, if you notice your daughter becoming overly concerned about her appearance or showing any of the symptoms of an eating disorder, talk to her directly about your concerns and observations.

Topics that may serve as a good discussion points:

- Normal variations in development and size/shape of women
- Cultural standards of beauty
- How to cope with teasing
- Peer pressure (and how you coped with it as an adolescent)
- Competing with friends

Supportive Communication

When starting a conversation, open-ended questions are recommended. An open-ended question will give your daughter a chance to talk about her experiences without communicating judgment (e.g., "What have you learned in school about eating disorders?"). Asking, "Do you have an eating disorder?" may result in a simple "yes" or "no" response. When we express our concern, we are wise to speak of our own experience (i.e., "I" statements) rather than assume we can figure the other person out (i.e., "you" statements).

When we speak in "I" statements, we take responsibility for our response. When we speak in "you" statements, we tend to make judgments about the other person, leaving him/her feeling that he/she has to take a defensive position. We end up locked in a battle of wills that leads nowhere. If your daughter does suffer from an eating disorder, it is best to start treatment as soon as possible. Please refer to the resources page at the end of the newsletter for organizations and specialists in your area.

Examples of "You" statements:

"You're too thin."

"You need help."

"You aren't eating enough."

Examples of "I" statements:

"I want to just say 'Stop!' But I know it's not that simple."

"I've heard you throwing up in the bathroom and I'm concerned."



Concluding Thoughts

We appreciate the time you have spent reading this information. As you have learned, the concerns associated with weight and shape in this culture are complex. We are bombarded with frequent and often contradictory messages by the media. It is not surprising that our children struggle with these issues.

We hope that you have learned new information and gained new tools for helping your daughter adopt healthy eating habits and become more accepting of her body. We encourage you to keep the conversation "alive" with your daughter. We have compiled a list of references if you wish to learn more about some of the topics we have addressed. Please take a few minutes to fill out the attached feedback sheet so we can learn what you thought about the newsletter. If you have more immediate concerns, please contact Liana Abascal via phone (650) 498-7681 or e-mail liana@stanford.edu.

Thanks,
All of us on the *Student Bodies* Team

Resources

Web Sites

About Face, San Francisco:	http://www.about-face.org/index.html
American Heart Association Dietary Recommendations:	http://www.americanheart.org/catalog/health_cat.page5.html
Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders:	http://www.anred.com/toc.html
Dads and Daughters:	http://www.dadsanddaughters.org/
Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention, Inc.:	http://www.edap.org/
Eating Disorders Shared Awareness, Canadian site:	http://www.mirror-mirror.org/eatdis.htm
Eating Disorders Shared Awareness, New York site:	http://www.something-fishy.org/
UC Davis Eating Disorder Web Site:	http://www.eating.ucdavis.edu/

Books

Cash, T. (1997). The body image workbook: An 8-step program for learning to like your looks. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Fairburn, C. (1995). Overcoming binge eating. New York: The Guilford Press.

Orenstein, P. (1994). School girls: Young women, self-esteem, and the confidence gap. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Wallack, L., Dorfman, L., Jernigan, D., & Themba, M. (1993). Media advocacy and public health: Power for prevention. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

For more books on eating disorders visit <http://www.bulimia.com>