

Defining Diet Culture

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



If you've ever felt guilty about enjoying dessert or worked out to burn off a heavy meal, you've been affected by diet culture. Defined as "the belief that body size is more important than physical, psychological and general well-being," diet culture convinces you that rigid control of your diet is somehow normal, and that only skinny bodies are acceptable.

From advertisements for "guilt-free ice cream" to diet apps that count calories, and extremely thin influencers detailing "what I eat in a day," diet culture is pervasive and highly influential. Sadly, diet culture contributes to discriminatory weight bias and fat phobia, which can lead to poorer treatment of people in larger bodies.

The truth? What seems like aspirational diet messaging has a serious downside, which can lead to an unhealthy relationship with food. Accepting diet culture's promise that "skinny" is best and that we should only "eat clean" foods can lead to:

- Poor self-esteem, negative self-talk and poor mental health.
- Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa.
- Orthorexia, an obsession with "clean" eating.
- Nutrient deficiencies.
- Weight bias.

While avoiding diet culture in our society is sadly impossible, you can prevent it. Here's how:

Skip websites or social media accounts that make you feel bad about yourself. Instead, fill your social media feed with influencers who embrace all body types, while supporting nutritious eating and joyous physical activity.

Treat yourself kindly. Skip fad diets, avoid detoxes and quit labeling foods as good or bad.



Remember that food is about nourishment but is also about celebration, family and enjoyment. If you need help finding joy in food, find health care providers who are trained in **body neutrality** or **intuitive eating**. They can help you learn to enjoy food and fitness while accepting your body.

Teaching Kids to Enjoy Exercise

Spring is a great time for kids to enjoy physical activity, especially outdoors. Growing up well and fit, children and teens (ages six to 17) need to get regular moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity preferably daily, as recommended by the American Heart Association and the CDC.

Most beneficial are daily aerobic activities and sports that strengthen bones and muscles and make hearts beat faster. Options include regular jogging and sports that involve running, jumping or swimming — at least three days weekly.

Benefits for kids who regularly pursue fitness exercise:

- A healthy weight.
- Strong heart, bones and muscles.
- Better, healthier brains.
- Good academic performance.
- Positive mental health, confidence and self-esteem.
- Less stress, anxiety and depression.



To encourage kids to exercise:

- Be a role model and focus on fun.
- Make activity social; take long walks together.
- Use competition as a motivator.
- Include kids in household activities.
- Use exercise as transportation; walk or ride bikes.
- Provide gifts that promote physical activity.
- Encourage intramural sports.
- Keep a variety of games and sports equipment on hand.
- Support your school district's physical education program.



Limit time spent in sedentary activities, such as watching TV, using smartphones, internet use and playing video games.



Summer is coming — a super time to get fit with the kids. Schedule a time each day for an outdoor activity together. Hike a local nature trail or ride a bicycle path. Provide toys that encourage physical activity, such as balls, kites, skateboards and jump ropes. To learn more, search for **25 Ways to Get Moving at Home** at [heart.org](https://www.heart.org).

Understanding Eco-Friendly Labels

Buying cosmetics, household cleaners and other non-food items that are

eco-friendly is a good idea.

After all, who doesn't want products that are safe for the environment? But labels can be hard to decipher and sometimes downright deceptive.

For example, *natural* on a label doesn't necessarily equate to eco-friendly. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission noted in its Green Guides there's no basis to define or substantiate what's truly natural. So, products may be labeled natural without any facts backing up that claim.

Tips for spotting truly eco-friendly labels:

- Although laundry detergents no longer contain polluting softening agents known as phosphates, which promote overgrowth of algae (causing toxins which can endanger people and wildlife), other potentially worrisome chemicals remain in some detergents. Look for **Safer Choice** eco-labels, which signify the EPA found the product's ingredients are safe for the environment.

- When it comes to cosmetics and other personal care products, **made with organic ingredients** on the label indicates at least 70% of the ingredients meet USDA organic standards. And **cruelty-free** means the product was developed without animal testing. **Note:** According to the FDA, "Cosmetic products labeled with organic claims must comply with both USDA regulations for the organic claim and FDA regulations for labeling and safety requirements for cosmetics." Cosmetics made with organic ingredients are not safer than those made with non-organic ingredients, the FDA says.



Personal Trainers 101

A personal trainer can help you tone up, improve stamina and reach fitness goals.

But he or she needs to develop a program that's best for you. Although friends and your health care provider may recommend a personal trainer, you'll need to do your homework.

Ask these questions:

Does a personal trainer have up-to-date certification recognized by: the National Commission for Certifying Agencies, American College of Sports Medicine, National Strength and Conditioning Association, or National Academy of Sports Medicine?

Talk to your potential personal trainers on the phone. Find out how much experience they have and what their educational background is. Get several references.

What's the trainer's availability? Does their schedule fit the times you have for workouts?

Do you have to work out at a specific gym or outdoor track? Or does the personal trainer come to your home with equipment?

How much does the trainer charge? Is there a cancellation policy if you have to change a workout day? And if hourly solo sessions don't fit your budget, does the trainer offer semi-private sessions with other clients or a discount for paying for several sessions at once?

If the trainer seems a good fit, meet in person before you commit. Are they encouraging and friendly or more like a drill sergeant? It makes sense to see if the trainer's style and personality are a good fit for you.

Tip: If your trainer starts to give you unsolicited medical or nutrition advice, remember that's not their area of expertise. Make sure you turn to the right professional, such as your health care provider or dietitian, for those needs.



Q: Need a knee replacement?

A: **Arthritis can cause the loss of knee cartilage.** This may result in pain, stiffness and decreased joint motion. When you have tried most treatments and still have disabling pain, your health care provider may recommend physical therapy or suggest knee replacement. The surgery involves replacing parts of your knee joint with artificial parts.

An evaluation to see if you are a surgical candidate usually involves determining the amount of disability you have from arthritis.

Commonly asked questions may include:

- ✓ Does severe knee pain limit your everyday activities?
- ✓ Do you have problems walking, climbing stairs and getting in and out of chairs?
- ✓ Do you have severe knee pain even at rest?
- ✓ Does it interfere with your sleep?
- ✓ Is your knee always swollen?
- ✓ Does your knee bow in or out?
- ✓ Are you less able to fully straighten your knee?

If surgery is under consideration, ask about the benefits and risks of knee replacement.



Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit coronavirus.gov.

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Health Impact of Nasal Allergies**, is at personalbest.com/extras/22V4tools.



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