

The Fat Facts

Excess weight leads to deficient self-esteem



DR. GORDON COCHRANE, R. PSYCH.

Cathy is 43 years old, married and the mother of two young boys. She works full-time as a nurse. She is five foot four inches tall and weighs 212 pounds. Cathy has tried many weight-loss programs with limited and temporary success. She now feels defeated, frustrated and ashamed because, as she says, "I've tried everything and nothing works."

What we know

Most overweight people share Cathy's perspective on weight loss. Most of them want to lose weight but, like Cathy, they repeatedly look for external solutions to their weight

problems. In so doing, they are repeatedly disappointed because the weight-loss industry sells the dream, not the solution. Fortunately, Cathy gave up on external solutions, but she did not give up on herself. She was tentatively receptive to the idea of strengthening her sense of self-worth and self-reliance so that she could become a healthy person rather than a person trying to lose weight. Cathy, like most chronically and significantly overweight people, had grown up with criticism, embarrassment and rejection, all of which contributed to her sense of inadequacy. The research shows that chronically overweight

people are most likely to overeat when they experience ego-threatening anxiety in the form of real or anticipated criticism, embarrassment and rejection. Their overeating results in weight gain, and their excess weight adds to their negative sense of self. Cathy felt professionally competent, but she said that she did not feel personally confident.

What we know isn't so

Many people believe that excess weight is caused by a genetic disorder, but the research does not support this belief. Sadly, overweight people who believe that their excess weight is the result of their genes either give up completely or relentlessly search for a new diet or weight-loss product to counteract nature. A 2004 report showed that 8% of immigrants arriving in the U.S. were overweight; 15 years later 19% carried excess pounds. Clearly, the disease model does not explain the relentless upward shift in the average weight of North Americans over the past 50 years.

What we know


When the behaviour and attitudes of fit people are compared with those of chronically overweight people, it becomes evident that overweight people do not value themselves enough to take care of themselves consistently. Overweight people are more likely than fit people to place the wants and needs of others ahead of their own, thereby leaving them little or no time to take care of themselves. In addition, those who do achieve lasting weight reduction understand that no diet or weight-loss program achieves weight loss. Individuals achieve weight loss. These individuals accept help to develop their sense of self-worth and self-reliance, and shift their perspective from simply shedding pounds to responsibly caring for themselves. This shift of perspective makes all the difference.

What we know isn't so

People with a damaged sense of self can't change; it's just too hard.

What we know

Every person's sense of self is a mosaic of emotion-laden self-perceptions. If you are chronically overweight, it is important to remember that most of the pieces of the mosaic that constitute your sense of self are fine and need no change. You are not bad or

weak, and you do not lack intelligence. You do, however, need to strengthen your sense of worth and your faith in your ability to take care of yourself over time. Self-worth enhancement is not an easy undertaking, but it is one of the most beneficial things you can do for yourself. Initially, you will need some professional assistance. Ask your family physician to direct you toward the help you need. 

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