

A MESSAGE FOR FITNESS PROFESSIONALS

No doubt you got into the fitness field because you're enthusiastic about good health and want to support and inspire others. However, you may be surprised to learn that some of the most basic assumptions you hold about weight and health aren't supported by scientific evidence. Despite your best intentions, the work you are doing may actually *harm* your clients.

Consider the calorie balance equation. You and your clients likely believe that if they just increase the amount of calories expended relative to the amount taken in, they should lose weight, right? Exercise should be the ultimate panacea in the weight war since it burns calories in the moment while also building muscle, an ongoing calorie-burning furnace.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. We can't control the calorie balance equation to the extent we've long believed. It's easy in the short term, which is why short-term weight loss typically occurs. But over the long-term the body has compensatory mechanisms that undermine its ability to maintain weight loss. Long-term studies show that few people maintain significant weight or fat loss by increasing their physical activity, *even when exercise habits are maintained*.

Another common misconception is that thin=fit. But did you know that it's possible to be both fat and fit? And that research consistently shows that fitness is a much better indicator of health than weight? Not only are there plenty of metabolically healthy fat people, but when you take fitness into account, many of the health risks associated with weight disappear or, at the very least, are significantly reduced.

I know it may be hard to believe these contentions given the current bias in the field. But when you consider that supporting people

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in their weight-loss goals is not just misguided, it's downright damaging, it becomes critical that you consider these challenges seriously. After all, you want to help people, not hurt them, right?

The reality is that few of us are at peace with our bodies, whether because we're fat or because we fear becoming fat. Repeated cycles of weight loss and regain, unhealthy weight loss behaviors, poor body image, eating disorders, stress, stigmatization, and discrimination are all collateral damage in the war against fat. Every time you make fat the problem, these are the side effects, however unintended they may be.

It doesn't have to be that way. Here's an easy prescription to do good:

- Support your clients in focusing on health and well-being, not weight. Help them understand that the problem is in cultural attitudes about weight, not their body.
- Support your clients in handling the unique challenges they may have with their bodies. Show compassion for the difficulties that arise from living in a culturally stigmatized body.
- Provide a friendly, non-judgmental environment that acknowledges and celebrates body diversity.
- Help your clients develop *sustainable* behavioral changes that easily fit into their busy lives.

For more information, check out *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* (www.HAESbook.com).

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