

Health At Every Size

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Health at every size, or HAES, describes an approach to nutritional wellbeing that emphasises the benefits of sound nutrition, active living and body acceptance as ends in themselves and frames size discrimination as a political issue. This marks a philosophical split with the traditional approach to public health nutrition, which emphasises the need to control eating, exercise and self-esteem as a route to weight management, and which may disregard, or even endorse, size discrimination.

A HAES approach has been shown to improve long-term physiological and psychological health outcomes (such as depression, hypertension, blood cholesterol levels) (Bacon et al., 2005) and encourages people to accept and take care of themselves at any weight so that they learn to trust their body signals, make peace with food and take pleasure in moving their bodies. In exploding the myths about weight and health, HAES promotes a critical, socially-integrated view of health and politicises size discrimination. In contrast, a traditional weight-centred approach has consistently been shown to be ineffective in achieving its primary goal of weight reduction (Mann et al., 2007) and, moreover, is strongly linked to adverse physiological and psychological changes (such as depression, loss of bone mass, adverse effects on cholesterol, increased risk of heart disease) (Aphramor, 2005; Aphramor & Gingras 2007; Robinson, 2007). In addition, promoting dieting inherently suggests that bodies are readily mutable and that thinness is more desirable than fatness, a belief system that cultivates size bias. The focus on weight as if it was a reliable marker of health also has the effect of circumventing a more politicised view of the factors that influence longevity and metabolic risk. It keeps us asking the wrong questions and pouring resources into projects and services that are doomed to fail.

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HAES then is an ethical, effective and evidence-based approach that has the potential to transform our relationships with food and our bodies, to turn the tide on the fat-phobia that is increasingly blighting society, and to encourage us to ask more searching questions about the role of non-lifestyle factors in determining people's wellbeing and life opportunities.

HAES UK is a UK-based independent non-profit organisation whose membership is open to all who support its mission. Launched by dietitian, Lucy Aphramor, and fat activist, Sharon Curtis, on May 9th 2009, HAES UK advocates for a HAES approach in healthcare policy, practice and research.

www.healthateverysize.org.uk

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