DIET CULTURE

Are you on the Keto diet? Are you intermittent fasting? When was the last time you did a cleanse? Have you given up sugar, or decided to go vegan? These are just a few of the many diet fads that are popular nowadays. Each one promises to deliver the Holy Grail... being comfortable in our own bodies.

As we approach the summer and shed our big sweaters and baggy pants, we risk revealing our bodies to the world; a prospect that strikes fear in many. Where does that fear come from? It’s the result of “diet culture.” Diet culture is the set of social standards that tell us we need to eat a certain way, or exercise a certain way, in order to look a certain way (i.e., thin!). And if we don’t look that way, we will not be accepted in society.

In recent years, the message of diet culture has become very sneaky. Instead of coming right out and saying “you need to diet to be thin” the message has shifted to focus on the health benefits of dieting. It will help you live longer, reduce cancer risk, “detox” your body, heal your gut. But really, it’s just rebranding. The message is the same: you are not okay as is, and you need to change your body to be lovable. Eating healthy is good. Exercise is important. Doing those things to change the appearance of your body is not.

With diet culture so completely ingrained in every facet of our society, is it even possible to break free and love how we look? It’s not easy, but it’s possible. Employ these tips to move toward a healthy relationship with your diet and your body:

- **Learn to spot diet culture.** Any eating advice that divides foods and behaviors into all or nothing categories (like clean vs. dirty, miracle vs. junk) is appealing to feelings of guilt and shame. Be wary of sayings like “Every bite you take is either fighting disease or feeding it”. These messages imply that choosing the right foods is a personal responsibility and a moral imperative.

- **Learn to spot diet culture at the gym.** Diet culture teaches that exercise exists to atone for the sins of what we’ve eaten, and that exercise can be used to “earn” food. The language of exercise is to go harder, faster, stronger with an emphasis on a “no excuses”. Instead, focus on the process and how movement makes you feel – not how you want it to make you look.

- **Rid your home of diet culture tools.** Get rid of things that keep you stuck in the diet mentality like low-calorie cookbooks, your scale, and even full length mirrors. Give away the “skinny” clothes that you’ve aspired to squeeze into for years.

- **Learn to “eat intuitively”.** To leave diet culture behind, you need to find a new way of eating that doesn’t rely on food rules. Intuitive eating involves making peace with all foods and relying on your body’s cues to tell you when you’re hungry and when you’re satiated.

- **Revise your goal from body image to self-care.** To change goal of your diet and exercise behavior from a body shape to health and wellness, frequently ask yourself “Would I still be doing this if I knew my body wouldn’t change as a result?” If they answer is no, revisit your decision to engage in that behavior.

- **Curate social media.** Unfollow social media accounts that uphold diet culture and search for new ones that include content about intuitive eating, joyful movement, and a weight-inclusive approach to health.

- **Remind yourself of the pleasure of food.** Delicious foods are one of the great pleasures of life. Slow down and savor the pleasure of a good meal that is made with love and that nurtures your soul.

Are you struggling with body image and diet culture, or any other stressor in your life? Call Family Services EAP. Your employer has made Family Services EAP a resource for you AND members of your household and immediate family. **We are here to support you.** Contact: 978-327-6666, info@FamilyServicesEAP.org, or submit an online inquiry today.