

***Special
Olympics
Washington***



WEIGHT INCLUSIVITY FOR ATHLETES

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What is **health**?

- World Health Organization:
*“Health is a state of **complete physical, mental and social well-being** and **not** merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”*
- Health can be **subjective**
 - Different measurements
 - Blood pressure, blood sugar, hours of sleep, physical sensations, social support, etc.
 - Based on many factors
 - Holistic view of health
 - Cultural differences
 - **Not** related to weight
- **Health does not have moral value**
 - A person’s “poor” or “good” health does not indicate their moral goodness

Body mass index

- Professionals often refer to **body mass index** to determine a person's health
 - BMI = a person's weight in kilograms divided by their height in meters, squared
 - kg/m^2
 - Created in the mid-1800's to quantify
 - **Surrogate** measure of adiposity
 - Cheap, quick, and easy to use
 - Favored as primary indicator of health by insurance companies
- BMI is an outdated tool
 - Does not reflect a person's overall health, wellbeing, emotional state, etc.
 - **Inaccurate in most athletes**
 - Inaccurate for different life stages
 - Not culturally appropriate
 - Relatively arbitrary

Weight normative approach to health

- **Health indicator:** Person's weight and/or body size
- **How to achieve health:** Weight loss, dieting, maintenance of a certain BMI or body size
- Regardless of chief complaint, a person in larger body may be told upfront to lose weight before or in conjunction with being offered other services
 - Example: An athlete who is in a larger body goes to the doctor for joint pain. The doctor bypasses an examination and instead refers the patient to “eat healthier” to lose weight.
 - *Hmm... Does this sound familiar?*

Harms of weight normative approaches

- Delayed or diminished care
- Weight stigma
 - Internalized, externalized
- Body shame
 - Appearance monitoring
- Decreased psychological well-being
 - Guilt, shame, compensation
- Decreased physical health
- Disordered eating behaviors
- Weight cycling

Weight inclusive approach to health

- **Health indicator:** Health behaviors (*physical, social, spiritual, occupational, emotional, intellectual*)
- **How to achieve health:** Change behaviors

Yes, it is that simple!

Principles of weight inclusivity

- Fight against weight discrimination, especially in healthcare
- Wellbeing is **multidimensional** and focused on **health enhancement**
- Care is **respectful**: accepting and appreciating diversity in body shapes, types, and sizes
- Eating is for wellbeing and focused on **mindfulness, compassion, and individual** nutrition needs
 - Emphasis on hunger/satiety cues and eating for pleasure
- Physical activity **enhances** life and is enjoyable
- Recognize the **individuality** of each athlete

Benefits of weight inclusive approaches

- Care that focuses on the person's needs and chief concerns
- Diminished weight stigma
- Body acceptance or neutrality
- Improved psychological wellbeing
 - Compassion, mindfulness, intention
- Improved physical health
 - Less focus on weight
 - Protection against disordered eating behaviors
- Culturally sensitive

Incorporating weight inclusivity

- No good or bad foods! Food has **no** moral value
- Educate athletes, parents, caregivers, coaches, volunteers about how different food groups/nutrients affect how body feels (**not** how body looks)
- Encourage self-compassion and body respect (**not** body manipulation)
- Teach practical skills like cooking, food literacy, balanced diet variation, and monitoring hydration
- Educate on weight science and multitude of factors of disability that can lead to weight changes
 - Medications, hormonal adaptations, etc.
- **DO NOT** place blame and responsibility on individual for bodily changes

Let's try some role play!

What if my athlete says...

“I need to lose weight.
Just 10 pounds, and I’ll be better.”

*What if a **parent** says...*

“My daughter can’t keep her hands off the snacks! I’m putting her on Weight Watchers.”

*What if a **fellow Coordinator** says...*

“Let’s try a weight loss competition!
Something like *Extreme Makeover: Weight
Loss Edition*. Whoever loses the most weight
wins a prize!”

*What if a **coach** says to an **athlete**...*

“We need to put you on a diet. I’ve heard the keto diet is good and helps people lose weight fast.”

In conclusion...

Our athletes are diverse, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to helping them achieve their health goals. However...

Weight inclusivity preserves respect for the diversity of Special Olympics athletes while fostering an inclusive approach to health and wellness.