

***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- BMI is an outdated tool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.