Weight Inclusivity

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Our Winter 2019 issue of Food for Thought explores the practice and principle of weight inclusivity: the acceptance and respect of the diversity of body sizes, and the rejection of attitudes that idealize certain body sizes and types while pathologizing others. Adopting a weight-inclusive approach with clients, and with ourselves, requires examining and correcting misunderstandings about the relationship between weight and health. It also requires addressing and moving beyond our biases about body size, particularly larger body sizes, and about people who inhabit those body sizes.

As Linn Thorstensson DíP NT mNTOI eloquently explains in Moving from Weight-Centric to Weight Inclusive, mindfulness practice, rooted in awareness and compassion, naturally supports a weight-inclusive approach to mindful eating with clients and with ourselves. She also points out some of the ways mindfulness has been misused in support of diet culture and weight bias.

In Breaking Down the Barriers of Bias, Nicole Eikenberry MS, RD, discusses how mindful eating professionals can address internalized weight bias when working with clients, putting such work firmly in the context of the ethic of modern medicine, of first doing no harm.

A Weight-Inclusive Approach to the Care and Feeding of Ourselves by Jenna Hollenstein MS, RD, CDN offers clients guidance about how to shift to a more compassionate view and treatment of their own bodies.

This issue concludes with a Self-Compassionate Body Scan, also by Jenna Hollenstein.

Thank you to this issue’s contributors for sharing their knowledge and expertise, and the entire TCME Community for your support of Food for Thought.
Mindful Eating

Research has shown that mindful eating is a supportive approach for fostering healthier relationships with food, eating, and our bodies (Warren JM, et al. 2017). It is important for healthcare practitioners to remember that mindful eating has its roots in mindfulness meditation and Buddhism. Yes, mindful eating helps us practice attuned eating, i.e. listening and responding to internal cues for hunger and fullness, but because mindful eating incorporates the fundamentals of Buddhist principles, it can also be seen as an extension of formal meditation practice.

Mindful eating occurs when we extend our mindfulness meditation beyond the formal practice and into our daily lives, specifically when we extend it into our relationships with food, eating, and our bodies.

From a Buddhist perspective, mindfulness is built on the two wings of awareness and compassion and it is a powerful way to support ourselves and our clients on the path to liberation from anxiety over food and body-image woes. Through mindfulness practice, we learn not only to be present with our direct experience of food and eating but also to notice our physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts. This helps each individual make discerning choices based on their own body's unique needs and preferences.

When we practice mindful eating as an extension of formal mindfulness meditation, we learn to pause, to notice, and to respond to our experiences with food with care and kindness rather than judgment. I am very excited by the emerging research on self-compassion as a practice to help prevent the development of either an unhealthy body image or disordered eating (Braun TD, et al. 2016). Finally the science is supporting our clinical experience!

Mindfulness is, at its core, inclusive. We are not striving for exclusion and separation; we are looking for wholeness. This is why mindful eating needs to be weight-inclusive. Mindfulness is not a vehicle to get somewhere else, it is a practice of learning to be with what

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is, and this includes everything in our experience, not just a selection of what we find pleasant. The most common co-opting of mindful eating is the use of this practice as a weight-loss tool. The very epicentre of intentional weight loss is trying to change our bodies to be something other than what they are. When you consider this, it’s easy to see why using mindful eating as a strategy for any intentional weight-loss pursuits is at odds with the very fundamentals that the practice itself rests on.

I’m sure you have seen, just like I have, “The Mindful Eating Diet” or the “Love Yourself Thin Diet” floating around. It takes many forms and goes by many different names.

Maybe you, as I have, provided clients with these “non-diet diets” in the past. Weight loss without dieting was a tagline I once had on my business cards many years ago, something I’m not very proud of. That was before I knew and understood that any intentional focus on weight loss is by definition a diet. We know that diets don’t work for the vast majority of people, and that dieting and unhealthy weight-control behaviours predict both a higher body weight and disordered eating after five years (Neumark-Sztainer D, et al. 2006).

The most frequent way I see mindful eating misused is as a form of controlling eating behaviour and food intake. Instead of opening people up to self-awareness in a kind, non-judgmental way, clients are asked to count bites, to focus on how many times they chew, and to find ways to distract themselves from food cravings. Usually this message arrives with the subtext that if they do it “right,” weight loss will naturally follow. Restrained eating, aka dieting, can play a large part in binge eating (Devlin MJ, 2001) as well as lead to an increase in body dissatisfaction (Lautenbacher S, et al. 1992), two of the very things that mindful eating, when practiced from a place of awareness and compassion, helps mitigate.

Like my dear friend, colleague, and former TCME board member Lilia Graue, MD says, “Co-opting mindful eating in a way that sustains weight bias and feeds the dieting mind is a betrayal of the ethics of mindfulness.” When we are teaching mindful eating as a way to control body size and weight, we are upholding the Thin Ideal and contributing to weight stigma, which has been shown to facilitate both disordered eating and weight gain via the fear of fat (Wellman JD, et al. 2018).

So what can we, as healthcare practitioners and mindful eating facilitators, do? We simply return to the roots of mindful eating and use this practice as we know and love it.

We practice holding our client’s desire for weight loss with the awareness that we live in a culture that values certain bodies over others, and together we practice acceptance of – and compassion for – the fact that we all have a lot less control over our bodies than we have been led to believe.

We practice mindful eating with awareness and acceptance that our bodies are always changing. Instead of trying to control them, we do the best we can to take care of them with compassion and respect in the present moment.

We guide our clients to find their own inner wisdom and to cultivate trust in their bodies again.

We help our clients hold space for all those parts of their bodies and themselves that they struggle with.

Most of all, we practice mindful eating from a place of weight-inclusivity because we know in our hearts that ALL bodies are inherently worthy of love and care.

And if we’ve been caught up in the weight-centric paradigm but are now seeing clearly the need for a weight-inclusive approach, like Heath At Every Size (Tylka TL, et al. 2014), we offer ourselves compassion for any harm we may have unknowingly caused in the past.

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Mindfulness is, at its core, inclusive. We are not striving for exclusion or separation; we are looking for wholeness. This is why mindful eating needs to be weight-inclusive.
As you align your practice with the weight-inclusive paradigm, most of the work will happen outside of your sessions with clients or students.

Creating a space for healing that focuses on attunement, authentic self-care, acceptance, and compassion requires a mindset that is grounded in the belief that all bodies, regardless of size or weight, are worthy of respect, autonomy, and trust.

We all come to this work with biases we’ve accumulated over years of socialization in a culture that expects and values an unrealistic-for-most body norm, and that propagates negative and false beliefs about those whose bodies don’t comply. These biases may even be reinforced by ideologies associated with mindfulness practices that elevate restraint as morally superior.

To have biases is human. Recognizing and working with our biases to mitigate the oppression they perpetuate is what creates in us the skills to be effective guides for enriched living and deep healing. The honor of offering such precious teachings comes with the obligation to continuously assess the impact of our approaches based on increasing knowledge, in order to uphold our commitment to do no harm.

Truly listen to the stories of heavier people and how they have internalized notions of being broken or wrong. Are you, as their guide, able to accept their body – every ounce of it – with unconditional positive regard? Further, and just as vital, are you able to offer as much for your own body?

Thin practitioners need to do the additional work of understanding their privilege in a culture hostile to larger bodies. It is likely that some of the clients you work with will want to lose weight in an effort to ease the isolating pain of prejudice. Weight-inclusivity does not mean opposition to weight loss, only the intentional focus on, and pursuit of, an outcome that is externally driven, is steeped in social injustice, and derails the process of attunement with one’s body and self. We can hold compassion for the desire for liberation from suffering while respecting, valuing, and caring for the here-and-now body.

“When we say we agree not to focus on weight, but continue to believe that a ‘right’ practice of mindfulness/compassion/mindful eating will lead to a change in body size – and are expecting said changes in the people we teach or care for – we do harm.” Dr. Lilia Graue, of Fiercely Embodied.

As you become familiar with your own biases, how they evolved, and how you can work continuously to develop a more inclusive space, it will take less and less effort to see the harm inherent in dominant and oppressive weight-centric systems.

There will be times when old ways of thinking or acting will sneak through despite your best intentions. With informed practice, it will be easier to identify your mistakes and embrace the opportunities to model showing yourself patience and compassion.

Breaking down the barriers of bias and creating kind connections as we honor the true spirit of mindful eating has the potential to bring to our plate more of what we all crave: PEACE and JOY.

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World Mindful Eating Month 2019

Kick-start the new year with an entire month of mindful eating reflections and exercises! Every year, TCME celebrates International Mindful Eating Day on the last Thursday in January. Beginning January 1st, In preparation for Mindful Eating Day, TCME members will share daily inspirational posts on social media, along with practical exercises that explore 2019’s theme of Stepping into Mindful Eating. These inspirations and practices are designed to be accessible to all people, including those who are completely new to mindful eating. They were created by the participants in the Stepping into Mindful Eating training led by TCME founder Megrette Fletcher, and current TCME board members Cuca Azinovic and Linn Thorstennson.

International Mindful Eating Day 2019 is Thursday, January 24th and will feature two sessions of interviews with leaders in the mindful eating community. The exact schedule has yet to be confirmed, so be sure to check TCME’s website closer to the date.

There are many ways to participate in World Mindful Eating Month:
• For discussions and daily updates, join the Facebook group World Mindful Eating Month 2019.
• Follow TCME on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram throughout the month of January.

Become a Sponsor for TCME’s Mindful Eating Resources

The Center for Mindful Eating is looking to build individual and corporate support from those interested in helping us provide high quality, researched-backed mindful eating resources for professional, public, and Spanish-speaking populations. Please see https://www.thecenterformindfuleating.org/Sponsorship/ for more information, or contact Ana at info@tcme.org.

TCME is proud to be sponsored by:

Tasting Mindfulness – Ambassador Level Sponsor

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A Weight-Inclusive Approach to the Care and Feeding of Ourselves: Applying the Antidote to Body Aggression

Jenna Hollenstein
MS, RDN, CDN

Adapted from the forthcoming book, *Eat to Love: A Mindful Guide to Transforming Your Relationship with Food, Body, and Life*

Because taking a weight-inclusive approach to the care and feeding of ourselves is somewhat counterculture, we may still find ourselves turning our self-aggression towards our bodies. Sometimes they disappoint us, get hurt or sick, or don’t fit the narrow standard created by the diet culture. When we treat our bodies with aggression, we often grasp on to what we like, aggressively resist or try to change what we don’t, and numb out to what we don’t care about.

There are parts of our bodies we are attached to or believe must be a certain way to deserve love and acceptance. There are the parts we hate and want to change to garner approval. Finally there are the parts we disregard or don’t even think about. Objectifying our bodies in one or more of these three ways might cause us to downplay other aspects of our lives, such as our relationships, work, and spirituality, would it occupy a disproportionately large slice?

The antidote to treating our bodies in these ways is to rebalance our perspective:

- **Re-evaluating our bodies more holistically:** Our bodies are basically good; they are doing their best and they do not want us to suffer. They deserve to be appreciated in their entirety and to be treated with kindness and compassion. In contemplating the basic goodness of the body, we acknowledge that there are parts of our bodies that are easier to accept, those that are more difficult, and those that we don’t even think about.

- **Placing our bodies in the context of what we value:** When we inhabit our bodies as the instruments that move us through the world rather than treat them as objects to be honed and perfected for the viewing pleasure of others, something shifts. With this perspective, we are more likely to appreciate and treat all the different parts of our bodies with respect.

  Treating your body as an object to be changed... only makes your world smaller. Viewing your body as the instrument you inhabit while you live your life... makes your world bigger. And better.

Jenna Hollenstein, MS, RDN, CDN, is an anti-diet dietitian, meditation instructor, and author of the new book *Eat to Love: A Mindful Guide to Transforming Your Relationship with Food, Body, and Life.*
Adapted from the forthcoming book, *Eat to Love: A Mindful Guide to Transforming Your Relationship with Food, Body, and Life*

To rebalance your perspective on your body, try a self-compassionate body scan. Wear comfortable clothing and lie down on a supportive surface such as a bed or yoga mat. Take a few embodied breaths, focusing on the feeling of the breath entering and leaving the body. Bring the following statements to mind as you do your body scan:

### My body is doing its best.

### My body does not want me to suffer.


**Shins, calves.** Skin texture and hair. Bones, ligaments, tendons, blood vessels. Muscles that carry me.


**Buttocks.** Skin, fat, muscle. Cushioning, supporting, protecting.


**Torso, chest.** Skin, bones, ligaments, fat. Tiny muscles stretch and support. Ribs that protect. Heart, lungs. Breasts that grow and change over time.

**Back.** Bones, skin, muscle, fat. Freckles, skin tags, bacne. Spine, vertebrae, nerves, sensory receiver, accommodator, shock absorber, workhorse, pain meter.

**Arms.** Upper arms, forearms, hands, fingers, nails. Skin, hair, fat, bones, ligaments, tendons. Biceps and triceps. Shoulders, underarms, nerves, and muscles. Connection.

**Face.** Skin, oily, ashy, dry. Acne, scars. Bones, hair, fat, muscles. Eyes, nose, mouth, eyebrows, eyelashes, ears.

**Cheeks, chin, forehead.** Connection, expression, communication.

**Head.** Hair, color, texture, thick/thin, skull. Protection, perception, learning, change, connection. Home to the senses.

Close your self-compassionate body scan with a few more embodied breaths.
References for “Weight-Centric to Weight-Inclusive” (Page 3)


For further reading

We share these resources for further learning with gratitude to Lilia Graue, MD LMFT, who compiled them for this issue of Food for Thought!

**English language resources:**

Teaching Mindful Eating from a Weight Inclusive Paradigm, by Lilia Graue, MD LMFT
https://www.fiercelyembodied.com/blog/2018/7/13/teaching-mindful-eating-from-a-weight-inclusive-paradigm

Why Mindful Eating is Weight Inclusive, by Lilia Graue, MD LMFT
https://www.fiercelyembodied.com/blog/why-mindful-eating-is-weight-inclusive

Teaching mindful eating from a weight inclusive paradigm, by Lilia Graue, MD LMFT
http://www.me-cl.com/mindful-eating-as-a-weight-inclusive-paradigm/

**Recursos de lengua española:**

HAES Mexico
https://saludentodaslastallas.org/

Enseñando alimentación consciente desde un paradigma inclusivo con respecto al peso, by Lilia Graue, MD LMFT
https://mindfuleatingmexico.com/mindful-eating-paradigma-inclusivo-de-pesos/

Por Qué Mindful Eating Promueve la Inclusión de Pesos/Tallas, by Lilia Graue, MD LMFT
https://mindfuleatingmexico.com/mindful-eating-inclusion-de-pesos/