




*mindful*  
EATING

Shifting the Focus from  
Weight to Well-being

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**W**eight loss interventions are ineffective, counterproductive, and harmful.

Studies have proven that weight loss programs do not create lasting changes in weight or health. A comprehensive review published in the *Journal of Obesity* titled “The Weight-Inclusive versus Weight-Normative Approach to Health” concluded that no weight loss initiatives to date have generated long term results for the majority of participants. Recent studies investigating the effect of intentional weight loss in people with Type 2 diabetes found no reduction in cardiovascular morbidity and mortality or all-cause mortality compared to control groups where weight loss was not prescribed or achieved.

**Weight loss interventions do not produce a return on investment.**

A 2015 article published in the *American Journal of Managed Care* concluded that employers should completely disband weight management programs, stating, “No corporate weight control program has ever reported savings or even sustained weight loss using valid metrics across a sizeable population for two years or more, accounting for dropouts and nonparticipants. Further, these programs can harm morale and even the health of the employees themselves.”

**What Now?**

There is a growing trans-disciplinary movement away from restrictive, weight-focused programs toward a non-diet, weight-neutral approach to healthy lifestyles. Simultaneously, mindfulness, has been shown to be a viable approach to improving health in the workplace. A variety of organizations, programs, and authors are advocating for a non-diet, weight neutral, mindfulness-based approach; evidence in support of this paradigm shift is accumulating rapidly.

**Non-Diet Defined**

A non-diet approach encourages a more natural, instinctive way of eating by re-learning to manage food intake using internal cues of hunger and satiety, rather than external restrictive rules that are often confusing and difficult to follow indefinitely.

A non-diet approach rejects the concept of “good” and “bad” foods in favor of an “all foods fit” model based on the principles of balance, variety, and moderation. Instead of a rigid eating plan, this approach promotes a balance of eating for nourishment with eating for enjoyment.

Research indicates that non-diet programs have positive and lasting effects on many dimensions of well-being, including improvements in total cholesterol, LDL, blood pressure, depression improved nutrient intake, reduced eating disorder symptomology reduction of food cravings and improvements in psychological and behavior outcomes, including self-esteem and eating behavior.

**Weight-Neutral**

Weight-neutral interventions embrace the fact that a person’s health status or risk level cannot be assumed based on a number on a scale. The weight-neutral approach recognizes that body weight is determined by a complex set of genetic, metabolic, physiological, cultural, social, and behavioral determinants other than energy intake and output, many of which are beyond an individual’s control. Instead of focusing on a weight-oriented outcome, participants in weight-neutral interventions learn to take charge of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, which ultimately leads to improved well-being, regardless of weight.

Much of the research on weight-neutral interventions to date has focused on a model called Health at Every Size® (HAES), testing it against standard weight-focused approaches. Results indicate that this model results in “both statistically and clinically significant improvements for the participants on physiological measures (e.g., blood pressure), health practices (e.g., physical activity), and psychological measures (e.g., self-esteem and disordered eating).” It is also noteworthy that weight-neutral models demonstrate lower dropout rates with none of the adverse outcomes found with dieting. Weight-neutral interventions in the workplace can help employers avoid the negative consequences of weight-focused programs, including weight cycling, disordered eating, weight stigma, possible legal ramifications and

the exclusion of employees who are not overweight but would benefit from engagement in lifestyle interventions.

Mindful eating is the application of mindfulness principles to eating behaviors and one's relationship with food. A simple definition of mindful eating is eating with intention and attention. Eating with purpose and awareness has powerful benefits because it helps people disengage from habitual and self-defeating behaviors and replace them with more skillful and supportive behaviors.

### The Mindful Eating Cycle

The Mindful Eating Cycle is a decision-making model developed by Michelle May, M.D. that integrates mindfulness with the non-diet, weight-neutral approach. This model provides a practical but powerful structure that helps individuals identify and resolve the underlying drivers of problematic eating and sedentary lifestyles, regardless of size or health status.

There are six decision points in the Mindful Eating Cycle.

#### Where do I invest my energy?

Widespread messages about “calories in, calories out” lead many individuals to equate exercise with punishment for eating or earning the right to eat. In addition, other factors such as lack of time, low energy, or physical discomfort contribute to negative associations and avoidance of physical activity. The non-diet approach incorporates a personalized, small steps approach to physical activity with the goal of rediscovering joy and vitality in movement.

Beyond eating and movement, mindfulness and the weight-neutral paradigm foster a comprehensive approach to well-being that includes emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical health. As individuals are liberated from a consuming focus on food and weight and develop mindfulness skills, their energy is free to invest in their lives and their work.



From Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat  
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#### About the Author

Michelle May, M.D. is the founder and CEO of Am I Hungry? Mindful Eating Programs and Training ([www.AmIHungry.com](http://www.AmIHungry.com)), an innovative company that empowers individuals to take charge of their decisions about eating, physical activity, health, and self-care. She is the award-winning author of the Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat book series. She will be a featured speaker at Employer Healthcare Congress in Washington, D.C. in September 2016.



#### About the Author

Rebecca Johnson M.S. is the Director of Workplace Wellness for Am I Hungry? Mindful Eating Programs and Training ([www.AmIHungry.com](http://www.AmIHungry.com)). Spanning more than two decades, her career in the wellness industry has included roles in coaching, health education, corporate wellness management, business development, and consulting.

launched “Workplace Wellness Trendsetters” social media groups available on LinkedIn and WeChat to attract and support professionals who are interested in establishing workplace wellness in their corporations. Through these channels and networks, AWB conducts bi-annual surveys to gauge the workplace wellness climate among Chinese companies and MNCs operating in China. The most recent survey from November 2015, showed 40 percent of respondents had a fairly comprehensive program, and another 40 percent had some offerings but not a systematic program. Among the companies who have comprehensive programs, there tend to be two approaches; the first is to start in HQ and then expand to regional offices and the second is to immediately begin offerings and services in multiple offices. AWB has seen success among both strategies with a key feature being digital communication and plans to move increasingly digital and mobile. Another key factor to success is strong leadership commitment and strong top-down communication to motivate employee participation. Chinese culture tends to be group-oriented and individuals can be shy so team activities, group challenges, and engaging leaders are a must. AWB has seen success among its China-specific designed offerings such as a smoking cessation phone coaching program, a healthy restaurant guidebook, group weight loss program, and group fitness challenges.

AWB Health Management is a Chinese company that provides comprehensive workplace health

consulting and solutions to Chinese and companies across China. AWB Health Management couples international best practices with local Chinese cultural and societal expectations. AWB’s health management solutions are tailored to fit Chinese needs. It is a member of the Workplace Wellness Alliance from the Institute of Health Productivity Management as well as CEO Roundtable on Cancer for China. At the base of every AWB program and service, is an emphasis on education and awareness so to introduce new health and wellness concepts to the Chinese. Learning works best to enhance program participation and impact supported by strong online support via WeChat and an online mobile platform that creates communities, stages activities and challenges and delivers content.

While awareness has increased recently, progresses are still timid regarding the enormous size of the workforce and the challenge. However we are optimistic change will accelerate as the younger, more educated generation is eager to learn how health and wellness can drastically improve their quality of life. On the other side, the older generation is still very receptive to the Chinese Traditions and Culture of Ying & Yang, balance through Tai-Chi, and QiGong, a traditional Chinese medicine-based diet.

Rejuvenating a new healthy lifestyle for China through Corporate Wellness has a promising future in China.

# Did you know?

## U.S. Pays the Most Money for Surgeries, Drugs

Have a baby in the United States and insurers pay almost \$11,000. In Spain, the cost drops is five times less. Australia? Two times less than the U.S. Health insurers in the U.S. pay higher costs for the same type of care, according to insurance industry group International Federation of Health Plans.

## Skip the Conference Room, Head Outdoors

Not only has the federal government issued a message to businesses to have walking meetings instead of sitting around a table, but the U.S. Surgeon General suggested it, too, in its latest campaign to consumers and businesses in the country: Step It Up! The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities. Think about it—30 minute walking meetings can burn an average 90 to 120 calories, depending on your weight. Plus, business mission accomplished!

### About the Author

Katherine Boe

AWB Health is a China market leader in workplace health promotion, fully dedicated to lead and assist clients to design and implement workplace wellness best practices, around medical, nutrition, fitness, emotional wellbeing and environment. Our vision is to improve the wellbeing of every organization in China.