

# EAT WHAT YOU LOVE LOVE WHAT YOU EAT FOR STUDENTS

a mindful eating program  
to fuel the life you crave



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# DON'T MEASURE YOUR SELF-WORTH

I've learned that wisdom comes from knowledge plus experience.

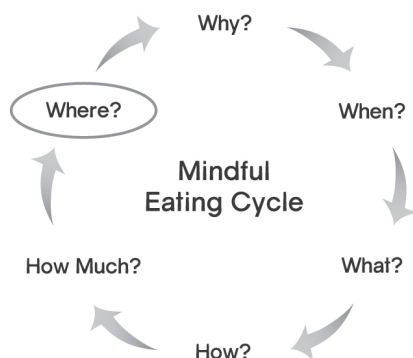
My yoga teacher said, "Whatever you practice, you get good at. If your habit is to compare, judge, and criticize yourself, then you'll get better and better at it. You will strengthen your habit."

That really resonated with me. I had subjected myself to 25 years of yo-yo dieting fueled by rejection of my Self.

Wishing I were somehow different and focusing on numbers like calories and pounds only distracted me from living my life fully. Unfortunately, many of us have been convinced that this is the only way, and that we somehow deserve a life focused on what we eat and what we look like instead of living our lives. We waste a tremendous amount of energy beating ourselves up—energy that could otherwise be poured into building relationships, accomplishing other meaningful goals, or simply enjoying life.

I am so over that.

Along my personal and professional journey, I've learned that self-acceptance breeds self-care. While it may seem counterintuitive, I also discovered that self-acceptance is the starting line for change. Now I choose to practice loving my Self gently, compassionately, mindfully, and persistently.



## WHERE DO I INVEST MY ENERGY?

We are bombarded with messages telling us we're not thin enough, attractive enough, healthy enough, rich enough, successful enough, or good enough. Enough! Striving to achieve some external measure of success cultivates temporary pride in something that is ultimately unsatisfying.

Buying in to society's messages leads to distorted, irrational, unrealistic, and painful beliefs and feelings about yourself and your body. Repeating these messages to yourself strengthens them, leading to lowered self-esteem, guilt, shame, and feeling that you are undeserving of the things you deeply desire.

Most important, postponing your life until you reach some arbitrary or outward definition of success or beauty consumes your precious time, energy, and focus. It dismisses your intrinsic self-worth. And though you may fear that if you accept yourself the way you are right now, you won't make changes, I've found that the opposite is true. You care for the things you care about.

## Body Image

A negative body image is more closely associated to appearance-related beliefs than to physical reality. Remember TFAR? Your thoughts lead to your feelings, actions, and results. Your view of yourself is formed by your thoughts and beliefs. You are at a much higher risk for feeling dissatisfied with your body if you have distorted thoughts about what you "should" look like. This results in negative chatter about yourself that plays over and over in your brain and can drive you to try fad diets and punishing exercise in pursuit of the thin ideal.

Kaitlyn reveals her struggle to accept herself.

I grew up in a small town. I'd always wanted to go away to college, so I was really excited to get a scholarship. But when I got here I felt so out of place. Everyone looked great and seemed so confident. I compared myself constantly and never measured up. I felt anxious all the time. That made it hard to make new friends because I didn't want to put myself out there.

Men and women of all ages, shapes, and sizes experience issues related to their body image. In a society that promotes unrealistic physical ideals, it may be difficult to resist comparing your body to others. The media, with computer enhanced models and celebrities whose careers depend on their looks, can distort your beliefs about what is acceptable. By fashion world standards, even average-sized women would be considered large. It's no wonder that women, and increasingly men, suffer feelings of inadequacy about their shape. These distortions may have been reinforced over time by friends and family members—and health and wellness professionals. When the promised results are not met, anxiety, depression, guilt, and self-degradation can result. Extreme dieting may also contribute to the development of eating disorders. Sierra shares her story.

I started dieting in high school. All my friends were doing it. When I started to lose weight, people kept telling me how good I looked, and then I couldn't stop. My friends told me I was way too thin but I felt like I needed to lose more weight. I always wore a big hoodie so people wouldn't see my body; besides, I was cold all the time. My parents got worried and tried to force me to eat; it backfired and I restricted even more. They took me to a counselor and dietitian who both specialize in eating disorders. By my senior year I was doing much better. I started struggling again after I got to college so my counselor back home referred me to someone near campus and that has really helped.



## STRATEGIES

### IDENTIFYING EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders are serious problems that can have life-threatening consequences. Eating disorders may arise from a variety of genetic, physical, emotional, social, and familial issues, all of which are important for effective prevention and treatment. The criteria for diagnosis are found in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5), and are summarized here.

#### **Binge Eating Disorder (BED)**

The criteria for the diagnosis of binge eating disorder includes recurrent episodes of binge eating characterized by eating an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat during a similar period of time and under similar circumstances. There is a sense of lack of control over what or how much one is eating during the episode. The binge-eating episodes are associated with three (or more) of the following: eating much more rapidly than normal; eating until feeling uncomfortably full; eating large amounts of food when not hungry; eating in secret; and feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty afterwards. The binge eating occurs, on average, at least once a week for three months, and is not associated with the recurrent use of inappropriate compensatory behavior.

**Note:** To learn more about BED, visit Am I Hungry? Mindful Eating Program for Binge Eating (<http://amihungry.com/Mindful-Eating-Program-for-Binge-Eating.shtml>)

#### **Bulimia Nervosa**

Bulimia nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by recurrent binge eating and compensa-

tory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting intended to undo or compensate for the effects of binge eating such as self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives, diuretics, or other medications; fasting; or excessive exercise. For a diagnosis of bulimia, the binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behaviors both occur, on average, at least once a week for three months. In addition, one's self-evaluation is unduly influenced by body shape and weight.

### **Anorexia Nervosa**

Anorexia nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by self-starvation and excessive weight loss. There are three basic criteria for the diagnosis of anorexia nervosa: Restriction of energy intake relative to requirements leading to a significantly low body weight; intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat, or persistent behavior that interferes with weight gain, even though at a significantly low weight; disturbance in the way in which one's body weight or shape is experienced, undue influence of body weight or shape on self-evaluation, or persistent lack of recognition of the seriousness of the current low body weight. The DSM-5 further identifies two subtypes of anorexia nervosa. In the binge-eating/purging type, the individual regularly engages in binge eating or purging behavior during the current episode of anorexia. In the restricting type, the individual severely restricts food intake but does not engage in bingeing or purging.

If you or someone you care about has symptoms of an eating disorder, it is essential to see a healthcare professional for referral to a qualified eating disorder specialist. An eating disorder professional will provide assessment and a treatment plan to address symptoms related to food, weight, body image, and self-care. For additional information about eating disorders, visit [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org).

Having a healthy, positive body image will do more to enhance your life than you might think. Self-acceptance, a positive attitude about your body, and an optimistic outlook on life enhances your overall physical and mental health. Students with positive beliefs about their bodies tend to spend less money on cosmetics, diets, weight loss gimmicks, supplements, and pills. They participate more in social and educational experiences without worrying about the opinions of others. When you choose to live in the present and accept what is and is not within your control, you'll be more grounded in the here and now. Feeling more centered and mindful helps drown out the negative chatter in your brain and all around you.

## 15 Ways to Practice Self-Acceptance

As you learn to accept, and even like, who you are, you'll begin to believe that you deserve good things, leading to a happier, more satisfying life. But where do you start? Here are specific steps you can take; choose one or two to work on at a time.

***Become aware.*** Your habits depend on your mindlessness. What are you practicing? What are the messages you repeat to yourself over and over again? Are they helpful or hurtful? When you notice you are comparing, judging, or criticizing, gently bring yourself back to non-judgmental awareness.

***Start with acceptance.*** Accept who you are and where you are right now, including your perceived faults. Certainly there may be some things you wish to change but it's important to love yourself unconditionally first—no strings attached. By accepting yourself, imperfections and all, you'll begin to appreciate your own uniqueness and respect your body and self.

***Practice.*** Repeat step one and two over and over again, no matter how many times it takes, until that is your habit.

Kaitlyn decided to try yoga to help with the anxiety she was experiencing.

I decided to go to the student fitness center to try a gentle yoga class. At first, I felt self-conscious and I wanted to leave. Then I remembered that strategy

where you change your emotions by doing the opposite of what you feel. I took off my shoes and laid my yoga mat down like everyone else. I wasn't the only one to raise my hand when the teacher asked if this was anyone's first class. She told us to be patient and that it would become more natural with practice. She was right. At first, I was always looking around to see what I was supposed to be doing. Everyone looked so flexible, strong, and graceful—I felt like a clod! The teacher reminded us not to compare and judge ourselves. Oh. That's exactly what I was doing. By about the fifth or sixth class, I knew some of the postures so I was able to focus more on myself than on everyone else.

***Get to know your true self.*** You are so much more than your body! Take time to do some soul-searching and discover who you are. What are your principles, your aspirations, your favorite attributes? What do you like to do, what are you good at, what do you want to learn? What do you really care about? Take the time to really get to know the person you spend the most time with.

***Ban body bashing.*** When you think or say negative things about your body, it hears you! Harsh and judgmental attitudes might cause you to delay self-care, waiting until you feel that you are more deserving. This becomes a self-perpetuating cycle. For example, avoiding social activities and isolating yourself can lead to emptiness—a void that you might try to fill with food.

When you become aware that you are saying unkind things about yourself, ask, “Would I say these things to a friend?” If you wouldn't, don't say them to yourself either. Let me take that one step further. Replace negative statements with positive, or at least neutral, messages. Take what you feel vulnerable about and look for the beauty in it. Instead of focusing on the parts of your body you dislike, find something to like and focus on that. If you have great eyes, shiny hair, long legs, or other nice attributes, love them, accentuate them, and show them off.

***Eliminate weightism.*** Like racism and sexism, “weightism” is bias and discrimination based on certain external attributes. Unfortunately, weightism is a form of discrimination that is still tolerated in our society. And like other forms of bias, it is hurtful and harmful. You can decrease weightism in two ways:

First, rid yourself of your own weightist thoughts. You may not even be aware that you're having these thoughts until you notice that you feel shame about your body. Stop hurting yourself! In addition, catch yourself when you are judging other people for their size, shape, age, and so on. Because these thoughts can be so damaging, work on replacing them with more realistic and compassionate messages.

- Bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- Health comes in all shapes and sizes.
- Beauty comes in all shapes and sizes.
- All bodies are acceptable, including mine.
- I honor and accept my body.
- My body is wonderful, and I treat it well.

Second, stand up to weight stigma. Bias and prejudice are cruel and destructive, not helpful. Don't participate in the conversation, and better yet, challenge it! Use positive self-talk and set boundaries with others. Examples of thoughts and statements to help you overcome the weightism of others includes:

- Weightism is the same as racism or sexism.
- My self-esteem does not depend on the opinion of others.
- If someone judges me by external attributes, it says more about them than me.
- Keep your comments to yourself.
- Everyone deserves to be fully seen and heard without judgment.

**Accept your genetic blueprint.** Remember that genetics are a strong determinant of body size and shape. As long as you are at war with your body, it will be difficult to find peace with yourself and food. With every disparaging glance in the mirror comes the promise of "just one more diet." Some fitness professionals insist that you can sculpt your body into any shape with the right type or amount of exercise, as if it were a lump of clay. While it's important to exercise and be healthy and physically fit, our culture promotes unrealistic

(and even unhealthy) expectations. Instead, respect body diversity and appreciate that bodies naturally come in different shapes and sizes.

**MINDFUL MOMENT:** We don't all wear the same sized shoes; why should we all wear the same sized jeans?



**Set realistic goals.** Besides your genetics, you must also be realistic about what it will take to achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Look closely at what you are willing to do, but also consider what you are not willing to do. If you are a foodie, you are setting yourself up for failure and disappointment if you think you have to follow a restrictive meal plan.

**Don't compare yourself.** For all you know, the person that you envy is naturally slim, spends an unrealistic amount of time at the gym, or perhaps even suffers from an eating disorder. Instead of trying to measure up to someone else, learn to focus on your own strengths and appreciate your own uniqueness. Kaitlyn realized something important.

When I compare myself to other people, I am not just judging me, I am judging them! I am making assumptions based on how someone looks without knowing anything about them as a person.

**Don't measure your self-worth.** Weighing yourself is meaningless and even harmful if you allow it to define your worth and determine your mood for the day. These are just numbers and don't say anything about who you are and what you are accomplishing as you strive to become healthier.

**Focus on function.** Focus on how your body feels and what your body does for you, not just on how it looks. Your body is complex and intricately designed. It is capable of performing complex tasks, doing great work, getting you where you want to be, and experiencing physical pleasure. In turn, the least you can do is appreciate and take care of it. Laurene celebrates her legs.

I have big legs. My mother had big legs. My grandmother had big legs. In elementary school, a classmate called me “Legs Larson” and the nickname stuck. I laughed it off, and felt no need to react negatively because I was lucky that I was raised to embrace what I was given! I didn’t compare my legs with my sister or friends who had long sinewy legs. What’s the point? These legs of mine have served me well. They enabled me to beat the entire neighborhood in bike races, power up hiking trails, play kick ball, and tap dance. How my legs looked to others did not impair my performance!

**Nurture your body.** Do nice things for your body such as getting a great haircut, using yummy lotions, having a massage, or learning a new skill. Treating yourself this way shows yourself and others that you are cared for and leads you to experience your body in more positive ways.



**MINDFUL MOMENT:** Care for yourself because you love and accept yourself, not so you’ll love and accept yourself.

**Respect your body.** In place of body loathing, develop “body respect.” You don’t have to like every part of your body to respect it. Respecting your body means treating yourself with dignity, caring for your health, and listening to your body’s needs. An example of respectful body message include “My body deserves to be fed and taken care of,” “My body deserves to be treated with respect and appreciation,” and “I am more than my body.” Further, expect the respect you deserve from others too!

**Get connected.** Your body is giving you a constant stream of information about what it needs. You’ve learned many strategies for meeting those needs. Pause to listen.

Kaitlyn is discovering the benefits of becoming more centered.

The most challenging part of yoga has been learning to calm down the chatter in my brain—but it's getting a little quieter in there! As I've continued to practice, I've experienced lots of changes—and not just physical. I am more grounded, less anxious, more accepting, and less judgmental of myself—and everyone else. I'm even starting to make new friends! In and out of yoga, I am learning how to stay present and just breathe.

***Live the big, vibrant life you crave today!*** If you are unable to accept and love yourself as you are now, it is unlikely that you will ever be satisfied with yourself no matter what changes you make. Instead of putting your life on hold until you reach some arbitrary definition of beauty or success, remind yourself that this is your life and you deserve to live it fully. Wear clothes that make you feel great, do things that make you feel brave, and make choices that bring you joy. Eat fearlessly and move mindfully in order to fuel the vibrant life you crave—and deserve.

Remember, what you practice, you get better at. When you chose to practice self-acceptance, compassion, and kindness toward yourself and others, you'll cultivate peace, courage, and joy. Those are habits worth strengthening!