

## **Make Your Week “Fat-Talk” Free For Eating Disorders Awareness**

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"You look great! Have you lost weight?" "Do I look fat in these jeans?" "I could stand to lose 10 pounds" "I was bad- I shouldn't have eaten that birthday cake." Do any of these sound familiar?

The week of February 5 -10<sup>th</sup> is Eating Disorders Awareness Week and the Health Unit asks that everyone accept the challenge of “no fat talk” by thinking twice about using statements like these. “Fat talk” isn’t about being overweight- it is the language that we use with ourselves and others when we talk negatively about dieting, weight and appearance. Mothers say these things to themselves and daughters, and friends use fat talk with friends. We read it in magazines, see it on television and overhear it at work and in the street.

Why is fat talk harmful? Sometimes we make these comments with good intentions, like trying to encourage someone battling with weight. But when the focus is put on weight or appearance- many unintended harmful consequences may result. In young people, as well as adults, focusing on being thinner or wanting to change one’s appearance can lead to disordered eating, preoccupation with food, fear of gaining weight, depression, negative body image and lowered self- esteem. Young people’s perceptions about themselves are affected by how the people around them talk about themselves and others. For example, if a child overhears a respected adult talking about weight or dieting, this sends the message that constant concern about weight and dieting are part of normal adult behavior. This type of talk encourages the idea that being thin should be the goal for everyone’s health– and this is simply not the case! There is no one body weight that is healthier than another. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

What can you do? Watch your words. The best way to help is to avoid discussing weight or appearance. Pay attention to the conversations that you have with others and those that happen around you. Instead of focusing on weight, appearance and size, shift your focus to strengths, accomplishments and abilities. Provide positive feedback and encouragement in other areas such as things you appreciate about someone’s personality, or something they have accomplished. If someone’s goal is to lose weight, comment on their determination to be healthy (not on the pounds lost). When we talk to children and adults, it is important to choose our words carefully.

<i><b>Harmful</b></i>	<i><b>Helpful</b></i>
Associating guilt with certain foods (good/bad or healthy/unhealthy foods)	Promoting that all foods can be enjoyed in moderation without guilt (everyday/sometimes foods)

Talking about BMI, assuming thinner people are healthier	Talking about and embracing Health At Any Size.
Talking about dieting or weight loss (with staff and students)	Changing the subject or re-directing the conversation away from dieting/weight loss
Complimenting people on their appearance (e.g. weight loss, body size, hair colour)	Complimenting people on their skills, abilities and personality traits
Talking about eating disorders signs/symptoms	Promoting positive self esteem and body image
Talking about avoiding fat, sugar, carbs, calories, etc.	Teaching the importance of nutrients to learn, grow and play. Enjoy a variety of foods
Making negative comments about your own body or the bodies of others (fat talk)	Making positive comments about yourself and skills
Associating physical activity with weight loss	Promoting physical activity as fun and enjoyable

Let's weigh in on body talk and challenge our words and actions to eliminate language that is damaging to an individuals' - especially girls' and women's - body image. Can you do it? For more information contact the Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark District Health Unit's Health Action Line at 1-800-660-5853 (613-345-5685).