

# Rediscovering Health

by Katie Koumatos

The Fat Acceptance Movement is built around efforts to change how fat people are treated and viewed. One of our biggest challenges is that we are arguing against some very prevalent and deeply embedded beliefs. Here are a few examples:

- Fat people are unhealthy.
- Fat people are fat because they over-indulge in junk food.
- Fat people lack the willingness or willpower to successfully diet.
- Diets work if you try hard enough.

The Fat Acceptance Movement argues that all of these statements are untrue and we have the scientific studies to back us up. It would take a whole book to explain all of this, to dissect the studies and prove how these beliefs are simplistic and unfounded. While I can't address them all in this article, many excellent books have been written on these subjects, some of which are listed below in the bibliography.

So let's just focus on your initial skepticism. This is hard to believe, right? Hearing people argue that body size naturally varies and fat people aren't necessarily unhealthy goes against what we have all been taught. As a fat person, it has been hard for me to believe it as well. But the more scientific studies and book I read, the more I became convinced. I have been living by HAES principles for a few years now and it has changed my life.

What is HAES? Health At Every Size (HAES) is a growing movement of health practitioners and activists that proposes a new approach to health. HAES principles suggest that we work on accepting ourselves as we are, relearn how to eat intuitively, and seek out joyful and rewarding physical activity. Some people argue that these guidelines are too lax, but these critics fail to consider how challenging it is to be truly honest with ourselves about our health.

Living by HAES principles takes a lot of hard work. It takes time to listening to your body about what food you really want to eat and then pay attention to how you feel afterwards. It takes perseverance to find and regularly participate in physical activities that you enjoy. These



are big commitments, especially in a modern world where so many of us choose our food based on what we can quickly grab on your way to work. But this is what following HAES principles entails. You have to make your health a priority, even in the face of deadlines and family commitments. It means taking time to rest, sleeping enough each night, and sometimes abstaining from activities because there isn't enough time in the day. Being healthy isn't easy, but it's a goal that everyone can achieve regardless of their size.

So where do you start?<sup>1</sup>

### **ACCEPT YOUR SIZE**

The first step is to begin appreciating the body you already have. Work on loving your body, even the parts you have been taught to judge. This is the beginning of true health.

### **ADOPT HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS**

Health refers to more than the lack of disease; it also includes your social, psychological, spiritual and emotional well-being. Here are some of the ways I try to engage in healthy living:

- Surround yourself with positive people who lift you up and celebrate your unique gifts
- Discover and pursue a career that you feel inspired and passionate about
- Eat nutrient rich and wholesome foods that make you feel good
- Become an active and responsible member of at least one rewarding community
- Move when your body wants to move and in ways that feel good.
- Make a personal commitment to your spiritual life
- Find mentors, guides, spiritual leaders and advisers to help you find your way

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<sup>1</sup> (Bacon 2010)



## **TRUST YOURSELF**

We were all born with an intuitive knowledge of when to eat, when to sleep, and when to move. As we get older, our intuition becomes overridden by external advice. Learn to listen and trust your own hunger signals. Notice how your body feels when you dance or run. Experiment with your schedule and see how much sleep you need. Trusting your body knowledge will go a long way towards finding your own sense of health.

## **EMBRACE SIZE DIVERSITY**

As we learn to love ourselves, it becomes easier to stop judging others. Accept the wide range of sizes and shapes that human beings come in. Open your mind to seeing the beauty in each unique individual.



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