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Adopt a Healthy Lifestyle During Healthy Weight Week

Possibly the single most common New Year's resolution made each year is to lose weight. Because of our cultural bias in favor of thinness, many people choose to go on a diet at the beginning of a new year, whether they need to or not. By the second week of January, many of those diet plans have been abandoned. Fortunately by then, episodes of holiday binging are just a memory, and most people are ready to resume a more normal routine. That's why Healthy Weight Week is celebrated during the 3rd week of January. This year, it runs from 1/19-1/25/04.

Instead of emphasizing the need for Americans in general to lose weight, the focus of Healthy Weight Week is to learn about healthy lifestyles and celebrate diversity in size. It is important that people recognize that the idealized slim figure seen in the movies and on television is not realistic or even healthy for most people. People vary in size, shape, and body type – a healthy weight for one person is not necessarily a healthy weight for another. Developing a healthy lifestyle not only will prevent eating and weight problems, but will result in fewer related medical problems.

Healthy Weight Week promotes good health at every size. Our culture's obsession with thinness and dieting, while encouraging the consumption of fatty foods, has created a climate of shame, guilt, and unhealthy eating patterns. While on the one hand, a former Surgeon General warns of an "obesity epidemic," cases have been documented of 6 year olds with "full blown eating disorders" and 80% of 10 year old girls are restricting food, according to information published by the U.S. Army. Unhealthy eating habits can result in obesity, which can lead to serious diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, arthritic joints, asthma, and an increased risk for certain cancers. Unhealthy eating behavior can also lead to problems caused by inadequate intake, such as irregular heartbeat, loss of bone and muscle mass, kidney and liver damage, gastric disorders, weakened immune system, low blood sugar, anemia, and stunted growth. Both overeating and under eating can result in depression and other emotional disorders.

By adhering to a practice of healthy eating, a person can achieve and maintain the ideal weight for his or her own body, resulting in increased mental and physical well being, an enhanced quality of life, and greater life expectancy. During Healthy Weight Week, people are encouraged to eat moderately, live actively, and accept themselves while respecting others. The key to achieving a healthy weight is to stop dieting and begin

eating sensibly while getting enough exercise. Weight should not be discussed in negative terms. This is a time to set new goals such as starting an exercise program and eating a wide variety of foods. The Healthy Weight Journal has several suggestions designed to help create a healthy way to think about your weight:

- Stop focusing on weight and weight obsessive thoughts, begin living your life instead of waiting to be thin.
- Eat at regular times, eat only when hungry, and stop eating when you are full. Include foods from all five food groups. Drink eight 8 ounce glasses of water each day.
- Find your own way to live actively, engaging in activities you enjoy and are likely to continue throughout the year. Forget about the number of calories you are burning, and do not overdo it.
- Give yourself 10-15 minutes each day to relax and relieve stress.
- Talk to yourself in positive ways about self-respect, esteem, and acceptance of your body.
- Respect others and embrace diversity in sizes; challenge size prejudice.

This year, why not make Healthy Weight Week a time to nurture acceptance of diversity in individuals and to promote changes to make your lifestyle a healthier one? Additional information about achieving and maintaining a healthy weight can be found at www.healthyweight.net, www.healthyweightnetwork.com, and www.hooah4health.com .