



Body Image Diversity

There is a wonderful story about body image in the book “Women Who Run with Wolves” by Clarissa Pinkola Estés. In the chapter titled “Joyous Body: The Wild Flesh,” she writes of a storytelling she did with a friend. Her friend is a very tall, slender African American woman with a split between her front teeth. Her friend grew up being mocked for being tall and as a child was told that the split between her teeth was the sign of being a liar. The author, a Latina, who is short and “of extravagant body” was told that her body shape and size were the signs of being inferior and of having no self control.

They both told of the slings and arrows they received throughout their lives because “according to the great ‘they’ our bodies were too much of this and not enough of that. In our telling, we sang a mourning song for the bodies we were not allowed to enjoy.”

Then they tell how the friend journeyed to the Gambia in West Africa and found some of her ancestral people, who had among their tribe many people who were very tall and slender, and who had splits between their front teeth. “This split, they explained to her, was called *Sakaya Yallah*, meaning ‘opening of God’ . . . it was understood as a sign of wisdom.”

The author went on to describe her own visit to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico, where she found *her* ancestral people. They included giant women who were strong, flirtatious and commanding in their size. They remarked that she was not quite fat enough – did she eat enough? Had she been ill? They encouraged her to try harder, “for women are La Tierra, made round like the earth herself, for the earth holds so much.”

The U.S. has a cultural image of what a body “should” look like that is limited. Some people will naturally fit the image. Some can force themselves into it with hard work. And there are many more people who “come from a different tribe.” Instead of unconsciously buying into a single concept of “the right body,” begin to choose for yourself. Diversity doesn’t just mean different ethnic groups or skin colors – our very size and shape is a wonderful collage of rich diversity.

Find your own place in the sun. What is the size and shape for you that is based on health, vitality and enjoyment – not on chasing after an impossible ideal?



Downshifting the Sugar Habit

Since the advent of high-fructose-corn-syrup and supersized soft drinks, Americans are consuming more sugar than ever. Even for those who prefer breads or chips, it is more or less the same in terms of being quickly digested and impacting insulin production.

Too much sugar (or refined carbohydrates) promotes insulin resistance. When the cells become resistant, more insulin is required to move the sugars from the blood stream into the cells for fuel. This increases the risk for type 2 diabetes, and also weight gain because the disturbance in sugar metabolism leads to a quicker conversion of calories into fat.

The more you eat of these foods, the more you want. And because they metabolize quickly, they leave you hungry sooner. While there is a short term feel-good-opium-like high; in the long run high sugar intake has been linked to depression and mood swings.

Yet cutting sugar out entirely doesn’t work either. What we restrict, we crave. We need a balanced approach. One way is to eliminate sugar (and refined carbs) for 3-7 days (or even for two weeks if you can!) Then experiment with how to add it back in much smaller quantities.

It works well for me to have one small square of dark chocolate (~ 1/3 oz) on a regular basis and to save desserts for special occasions. (See my February newsletter for more on dark chocolate.) For me special occasions just happen once or twice a month: if you have events all the time, you might need a different approach.

If you currently have 3 or more sweets a day, consider downshifting to one a day. I find that once my clients get used to *less* sweets, they are often ready to cut back even further. Even having one a day keeps it on your mind. When you just don’t eat them regularly, you can stop thinking about it.

We don’t “need” sugar as part of a healthy diet. Find the balance that allows you to fully enjoy your favorites without making it a daily habit.

Want Support? *Many of my clients know what to eat but want support with actually doing it. It helps to have someone help you choose a strategy and stay focused. Sessions range from 30 min by phone to 1-2 hours in person. Call me to discuss what would work best for you.*

Kathy Nichols: Life Coach & Registered Dietitian

Are you ready to stop dieting and looking for a way of eating that is sustainable, enjoyable and healthy?

Discover Wellness from the Inside Out!

