

Live Well to
Learn Well

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Ways to Respond to Weighty Remarks

How do you react when someone makes a comment about eating, weight, or body shape? Many people use the remarks below without thinking of how they might make others feel.

You do not always need to respond to “body talk” or “number talk,” (talk about calories, weight, measurements, etc.) but if you want to respond, can help set a boundary or help others reconsider their attitudes. Here are some suggestions for how to respond:

“You look great — have you lost weight?”

- I’m not sure, but I like to pay attention to how my body feels and not what the scale says.
- Nope. But I’m feeling great!
- I don’t know and I don’t care.
- Did I not look good before?

“Oh, have you gained weight?”

- Does it matter to you? Because it doesn’t to me.
- I’m not sure, I prefer not to keep track of that sort of thing.
- Yeah, I’m feeling better!

“How can you eat that much and stay so thin?”

- It’s just the way my body works.
- Everyone has a different metabolism and genetic makeup. This is just what I need.
- I’m not trying to focus on how much I’m eating. Can we talk about something else?
- I have to in order to maintain a stable weight.
- Being thin isn’t a goal for me; I just try to eat what makes me feel good.

“Why are you eating so much bread and pasta?”

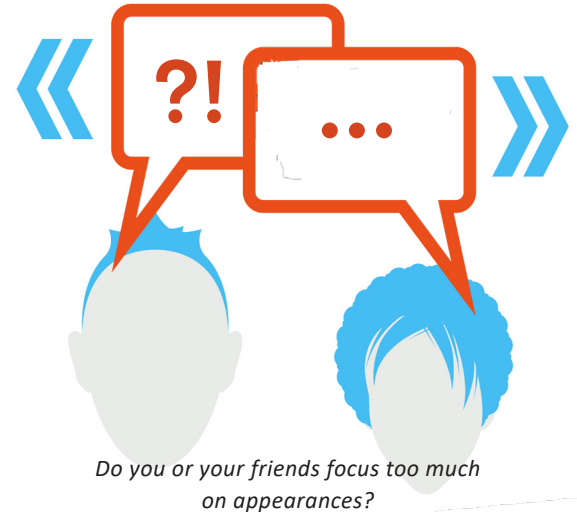
- Because I love it!
- I need carbohydrates for energy. It’s our primary fuel source!
- Because I don’t want to deprive myself of the foods I enjoy and my body needs.

“How can you eat that? It has so much fat!”

- Fat makes food delicious.
- Easy! I put it in my mouth and chew.
- We need fat in our diet. Without it you can’t absorb some vitamins or produce hormones.

“Maybe you should eat less/go on a diet.”

- I prefer to eat intuitively.
- Thanks for the unsolicited advice, but most diets don’t work or provide enough energy.
- Avoiding food just makes me want it more.
- People in my family have unhealthy relationships with food. I want something different.



- Who wants to spend time worrying about food? I have better things to focus on.

“I hate the way I look.”

- I like who you are inside and out.
- Hey! Don’t talk about my friend that way!
- Sometimes when I don’t feel like my best self, it’s because I have other stressors going on. Is there something else that’s bothering you?
- If it feels hard to be kind to yourself, you might feel better if you think more neutrally about your body.
- Is there something that would make you feel more comfortable in this moment?

“Look at them. They shouldn’t wear that!”

- Why does what they’re wearing bother you?
- I think they look great!
- People should feel free to wear what they like.

“Eating again? You can’t be hungry already!”

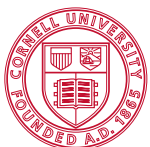
- (direct eye contact) Yup! / Yes!
- Yes, I listen to my body’s hunger signals.
- I am hungry whenever my body tells me I am.
- Sure, my body needs fuel.

“I wish I could be like you—you’re so thin!”

- I think you meant that as a compliment, but I’d rather be recognized for who I am and not how my body looks.
- Why is being thin so important?

“I feel so fat!”

- Fat is not a feeling.
- Our bodies change all the time; it’s ok.
- Whatever; come dance with me!
- Let’s talk about more important things.



“I have to go work out!”

- Says who?
- Exercise is best when it’s fun.
- Rest days are important too.
- You don’t *have* to do anything; do you *want* to?
- Too much exercise puts stress on the muscles and immune system.

Body Image: Do’s & Don’ts

What does it mean when we make comments about weight or our bodies? If we want our environment and actions to reflect our real values, rather than outer appearances, we need to reevaluate what we say and how we look or see others.

What’s more important is that our bodies can do many great things for us. If we feel badly about ourselves, it’s easy to use the common remark “I don’t like the way I look”—but that doesn’t really help us sort out our underlying feelings, and it may encourage others to worry about their bodies as well.

Remember these points

Your body shape and size should not limit your happiness. You have the right to go places, try things, eat what you want, wear what you want, swim, dance, create, and do other stuff you enjoy! If anyone tries to make you feel bad because of the skin you’re in, it’s up to them to change, not you.

- You have the right to be comfortable in your own skin, whatever your size.
- Give your body the credit it deserves—it has gotten you this far! Allow yourself to appreciate all the things it does for you, including moving through the world and exploring it through your various senses. Respect your body’s accomplishments, and others will begin doing the same.
- Sometimes people say things about our bodies that can be hurtful. Take a deep breath and remember that those statements say more about how that person’s own relationship with eating and body image look like and less about who you are.
- If a person consistently puts you down or makes you feel bad, consider confronting their actions directly and/or finding a way to spend less time with that person.

- If you are spending a lot of time worrying about your body weight, shape or size, you may find it helpful to talk with a counselor or another support person. Please review the resources listed here.

CHEP

The Collaborative Health and Eating Program (CHEP) provides high-quality, integrated medical, counseling, and nutritional to address the eating concerns of undergraduate and graduate students in the Cornell community. CHEP strives to help students enhance their personal health, academic potential and overall well-being.

Appointments

To make a CHEP appointment for yourself or to get information about how to help a friend, call Cornell Health during regular business hours at 607-255-5155. You can also schedule appointments online at myCornellHealth.health.cornell.edu.

Website

For more detailed information about CHEP and links to other web resources, please check the web at health.cornell.edu/CHEP.

Other resources

- **Body Positive Cornell (BPC)** is a peer-led group in which students meet weekly for one-hour for a period of 8 weeks. The BPC curriculum helps students challenge unhealthy norms and expectations regarding health and appearance, consider their own relationships with their bodies, and cultivate greater body appreciation and overall well-being: health.cornell.edu/bodypositive.
- **National Alliance for Eating Disorders** provides referrals, support groups, and advocacy for treatment across the US. Visit allianceforeatingdisorders.com.
- **National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)** provides information and referrals: 1-800-931-2237 or nationaleatingdisorders.org.