



Coming Back Together: Supporting Body Image

If you are concerned about the ways that your body size has changed during the pandemic, you are not alone. The majority of Americans experienced unwanted change in their body size during the pandemic as it has been a period of increased stress and change in patterns. Just like many people have experienced change in sleep patterns, many people have had changes in their body size.

These changes can be the result of a normal process in which the body is responding to the stress of surviving a global pandemic.

Our culture sends many messages about the morality or self-control we should have in managing our bodies, but these messages are distorted. During a global pandemic, our bodies and minds are primarily trying to keep us safe from the threats and uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic by producing stress hormones such as cortisol. Stress hormones influence our weight and body size, so it is normal to have some changes to body size during a period of prolonged stress.

We can employ several strategies to support ourselves and others around body image and size:

1. **Practice self-compassion** about the changes and stresses that you have experienced during the pandemic. You can specifically bring up self-compassion when you hear critical messages from your own self-talk or from others.
2. **Steer clear of talking about body size, changes in bodies, or judgements about food.** Talking about whether a food is “good” or “bad,” or saying that “I really let myself go” when referring to our bodies keeps negative self-talk about food and size front of mind. It can also be challenging for others who are struggling with their body image. Note: In this culture where thin bodies are idealized, it may seem kind to compliment someone’s weight loss. However, we don’t know why that person has lost weight: it may be due to disordered eating or eating disorders, sickness, medication change, depression, grief, etc.
3. **To delve into the topic of body size further**, here are a handful of resources that focus on body acceptance or Health At Every Size (HAES):

Books: *Health At Every Size* by Lindo Bacon, *Intuitive Eating* by Tribole & Resch, *What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About Fat* by Aubrey Gordon, *Belly of the Beast* by Da’Shaun L. Harrison, *The Body is Not an Apology* by Sonya Renee Taylor

Podcasts: Maintenance Phase, She’s All Fat, The Fat Lip

Educators/Activists: Sonya Renee Taylor, Aubrey Gordon, Da’Shaun Harrison, Ragen Chastain, Christy Harrison, Saucy West

If you find that you would like support, you can schedule with one of the counselors at the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) by emailing eap@austin.utexas.edu or calling 512-471-3366.