

Size Acceptance! What do you mean?

Valentine's Day is upon us, and so I want to take this opportunity to talk about befriending ourselves in the name of "size acceptance."

This term was new to my ears 15 years ago when I was riding home after a conference where nutrition professionals were grappling with the "growing" problem of overweight Americans.

As a professor and I were discussing how to educate people about making healthy food choices and increasing physical activity, another colleague posed the question, "What about size acceptance?"

"SIZE ACCEPTANCE! What do you mean?" And so began my education about the importance of including these crucial principles in all our health messages.

First, a definition as stated in a recent University of Wyoming publication, "The ABCs of Health-Focused Well-Being":

Size Acceptance — a way of relating to oneself and others that involves valuing every body, regardless of size or shape; accepting there is no ideal body size, shape, or weight that every individual should strive to achieve; and identifying one's strengths and abilities and building on one's assets and encouraging other individuals to do the same.

Every day I am reminded that our society is very far from living according

to this guidance. Just look at the magazines at the grocery store checkout with their constant messages about dieting and size-prejudice.

Or spend a minute exposed to the media and you will hear about the "obesity epidemic," of which one of my friends said, "We certainly have an epidemic, although it isn't necessarily about obesity; almost no one is happy with their body."

Unfortunately, my friend seems to be right. We all need to develop a greater awareness about befriending ourselves and others.

The following principles are part of the Guiding Principles of WIN Wyoming (Wellness IN Wyoming), another important resource from UW.

Principles of Body-Size Diversity and Size Acceptance

- Celebrate — as a positive characteristic of the human race — the fact that human beings come in a variety of sizes and shapes.

- Recognize that people of all sizes



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and shapes can reduce their risk of poor health by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

- Accept that there is no ideal body size, shape or weight that every individual should strive to achieve.

- Help people feel good about their bodies and about who they

are. This helps motivate and maintain healthy behaviors, because self-esteem and body image are strongly linked.

- Recognize that each person is responsible for taking care of his/her own body.

- Define good health as a state of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being, not as a function of body size.

I believe that these principles are the cornerstone for giving everyone permission to accept and care about himself. I realize we live in a society that puts great emphasis on appearances, but in my opinion, our beauty doesn't have as much to do with our outsides as with our inner qualities.

That sure is what I notice here at the Senior Center: Those who appear the most beautiful are the ones who seem to live life to the fullest, whose attitudes are on the sunny side, and whose smile is one of their most attractive features.

In addition, I also want to highlight a most effective approach to fitness for every body from the aforementioned publication Health At Every Size — "a nondieting approach to well-being that is rooted in self-acceptance and celebrates the natural diversity in body sizes and shapes. HAES encourages people to take pleasure in eating healthfully, to get in touch with internal signals, and to enjoy some form of physical activity."

So as we celebrate Valentine's Day, please consider being more loving toward yourself. Be kind to your body, befriend it by appreciating its many qualities, and care for it by creating a lifestyle based on healthy attitudes and behaviors related to physical activity, food and eating, and body image.

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Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.