

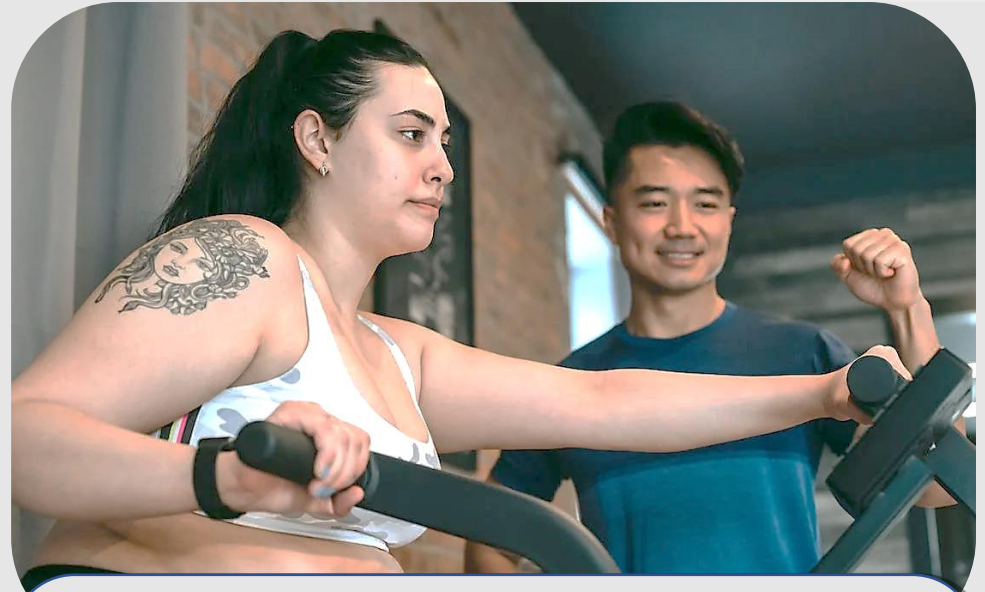
**Do Now**

# Lesson 5: Body image, social media and eating disorders



Meghan has always been slightly overweight. She has never cared; she plays sports, is healthy and beautiful. Yet recently she's spent a lot of time on TikTok, has stopped her exercise regime and instead has become hyper-focused food and her size.

**Discuss:** What kind of TikTokers might Meghan be following? Do you think many of the TikTokers are likely to be medical professionals?



What do you think people mean when they talk about 'health at every size'?

*I think when people talk about health at every size they might mean...*

**The Body Positivity Movement** - a social movement focused on the acceptance of all bodies, regardless of size, shape, skin tone, gender, and physical abilities.

**Obesity** - the state or condition of being very fat or overweight.

**Eating disorders** - any of a range of mental conditions in which there is a persistent disturbance of eating behaviour and impairment of physical or mental health.

**Critical thinking** - the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgement.



### **Learning outcomes:**

Describe how media influences body satisfaction and body image and how to critically appraise health information from online sources.

**Has the body positivity movement gone too far? Is it ok to still embrace your body's size when there are potential health issues at stake? Watch the clip and complete the questions on your answer sheet.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34ZI-aldIK4>



**What happened to Lexi when she was growing up?**

**What does Lexi want?**

**What is 'fatphobia'?**

**How much weight did Jonathan lose?**

**Why were people upset with Jonathan on social media?**

**How can we tell Lexi may be in denial about the danger she's in?**

**What do the doctors say to Lexi?**

**What is Dr Phil's advice?**



## Has the body positivity movement gone too far?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34ZI-aldIK4>

### What happened to Lexi when she was growing up?

She was bullied, and adults would make comments about her overweight body.

### What does Lexi want?

To inspire people to love themselves the same way she does.

### What is 'fatphobia'?

A fear of fat people

### How much weight did Jonathan lose?

145lbs

### Why were people upset with Jonathan on social media?

Because they felt he was damaging the body acceptance movement and taking the moral high ground.

### How can we tell Lexi may be in denial about the danger she's in?

She asks the doctors what their favourite studies are on healthy obese people.

### What do the doctors say to Lexi?

That overweight people do have more health problems, on average.

### What is Dr Phil's advice?

Deal with reality and study the science.

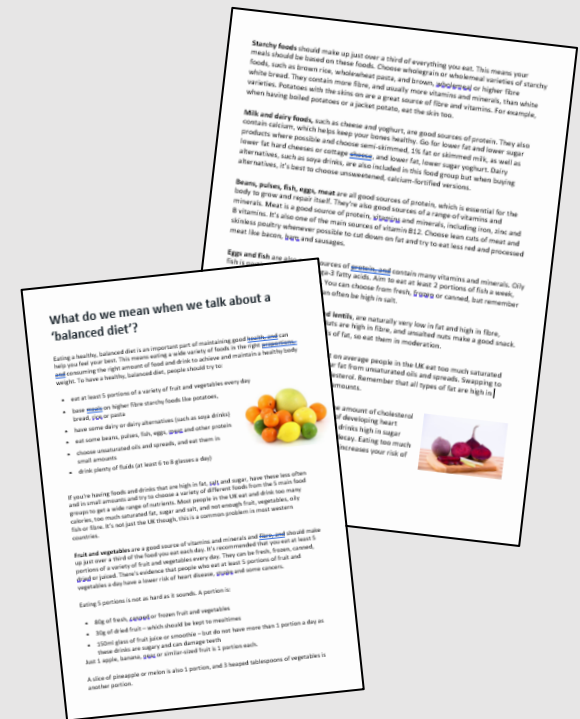


# Body image, social media and eating disorders



We will now find out more about the different opinions on the health at every size movement. Read the two articles by Rani Sizewell and Amii Taddleston-Burgh (which as you will find have completely contrasting views).

With a partner, go through each article underlining the parts which you believe to have a good point and the parts you feel are extreme or offer poor advice. Try to find five in each article.



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### Article One - **Why the 'body positive movement' has a lot to answer for (by Rani Sizewell) 2023**

Many of us have heard the phrase, 'health at every size' but what does it actually mean? Does it really mean at *every* size? How about those size-zero individuals (often female) with blatant eating disorders, who suffer the pain of catwalk-heroine chic? Can an anorexic frame ever be healthy? What about the other side of the scales (if you'll excuse the pun) – how about icons such as Tammy and Amy, the much maligned 'Thousand Pound Sisters'? Can a person such as poor Tammy Slayton, really be healthy at her size? Her morbidly obese size of 600lbs?

Some self-proclaimed 'fat activists' (fatcivists, if you will) say yes. Yes you can be morbidly obese and still be healthy. And here is the time when we can say – ok – there are exceptions. Some rugby players, weight-lifters, and even sumo-wrestlers would be officially obese and are indeed healthy (for now, whilst competing, at least). Yet let's be honest here – how many of the obese people we see on our TVs, on shows like 'Fat Britain' and 'Thousand Pound Sisters' are actually athletes?

Spend five minutes on TikTok on any #fatpositivity thread and you would think that these people can do absolutely nothing about their predicaments – in fact, they're born into it. They are oppressed and you are fatphobic. You are the problem. Fatness is compared to racism – or even disability. They are a marginalised group – and they shouldn't have to change to fit the world (they say), instead the world should change to fit them. Celebs with clothing lines that only go up to an XXL are attacked, airlines which only cater to the large, and not the superlarge with their seats are boycotted and , anyone who suggests they should just slim down about to be healthier is seen as a borderline fascist.

## Article One - Why the 'body positive movement' has a lot to answer for (by Rani Sizewell) 2023



I mean – I agreed with all those Dove adverts back in the 2000s – it's great to see a mix of body shapes in the media, but from what I remember, those women were grooving about to tunes in their underwear – not struggling to get off the couch to put the record on in the first place. I'm all for body positivity but there is a limit. If your ideology is actually making you ill – it's time for a rethink. Let's look at the medical info and statistics, shall we?

The World Health Organisation tells us that:

- 1) Worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975.**
- 2) In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults, 18 years and older, were overweight. Of these over 650 million were obese.**
- 3) 39% of adults aged 18 years and over were overweight in 2016, and 13% were obese.**
- 4) Most of the world's population live in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight.**
- 5) 39 million children under the age of 5 were overweight or obese in 2020.**
- 6) Over 340 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 were overweight or obese in 2016.**
- 7) Obesity is preventable.**

# Article One - Why the 'body positive movement' has a lot to answer for (by Rani Sizewell) 2023



You hear that? Preventable. Now, BMI, the fat activists will tell you, is a discredited way of measuring health – and yet here are the WHO using exactly these terms when they state:

**Raised BMI is a major risk factor for noncommunicable diseases such as:**

- **cardiovascular diseases (mainly heart disease and stroke), which were the leading cause of death in 2012;**
- **diabetes;**
- **musculoskeletal disorders (especially osteoarthritis – a highly disabling degenerative disease of the joints);**
- **some cancers (including endometrial, breast, ovarian, prostate, liver, gallbladder, kidney, and colon).**
- **The risk for these noncommunicable diseases increases, with increases in BMI.**

## Article One - Why the 'body positive movement' has a lot to answer for (by Rani Sizewell) 2023



And you haven't heard the best bit:

Childhood obesity is associated with a higher chance of obesity, premature death and disability in adulthood. But in addition to increased future risks, obese children experience breathing difficulties, increased risk of fractures, hypertension, early markers of cardiovascular disease, insulin resistance and psychological effects.

Can you think of a more irresponsible movement? Telling our children that health at every size is possible? Obesity is a disease. A disease – remember those – like Covid? Generally, when people suffer from diseases, we try to recover from them – we look for a cure, we try to avoid catching them in the first place. And mentioning Covid as an example is a particularly pertinent point because if you were obese during the pandemic, you were ten times more likely to pass away.

We are lucky to be living when we are – we live lives of abundance. We know what's good and bad for us – we live in a time of science. What we don't live in a time of is responsibility, self-awareness and truth. The truth may be unpalatable, but it may well save your life. Health at every size won't.

## **Article Two: Why we need the health at every size movement**

**(Amii Taddleston-Burgh 2023)**



### **Article Two: Why we need the health at every size movement (Amii Taddleston-Burgh 2023)**

I have always been a strong proponent of the body-positive movement. But I'm not just talking about those annoying Insta-models, who can just about pinch an inch under their ribcage and then wattle on about how it doesn't matter because all bodies are beautiful. I'm not talking about 'dad-bods'. I'm not talking about people who are 'curvy.'

If body positivity is going to do what it was always supposed to do, it needs to include fat acceptance. It needs to include those in marginalized bodies and bodies that are not culturally accepted now – the fats. Yes – it's not a dirty word. It's reclaimed, and in reclaiming it, we fat activists have the power. I do want to see larger seats on planes, in offices, on buses. Why not reflect the size of the general population? Wasn't that how the sizes for these objects were decided upon in the first place? Now these objects are just manifestations of thin privilege. Fighting for fat activism could make public life and public spaces available for everyone, and make existing in whatever body possible and not shameful, so maybe one day people wouldn't have to go through the shame of feeling like they just don't fit in.

## Article Two: Why we need the health at every size movement (Amii Taddleston-Burgh 2023)



Now let's look at the barriers fat people face (source – [verywellmind.com](https://www.verywellmind.com))

- **Fat women receive harsher criminal sentences than thinner women, earn lower salaries, and are less likely to be admitted to colleges.**
- **Fatphobia is a global problem in healthcare practice, with doctors sometimes withholding treatment from people with obesity unless they lose weight.**
- **The assumption that fat people are simply too lazy or too indulgent prevails in healthcare settings, many of which also lack the proper furniture, tools, or machinery to give patients with larger bodies suitable care.**
- **Fat people also say that doctors routinely dismiss their legitimate health concerns, blaming any problem they have on their weight. These microaggressions can lead larger people to skip medical visits altogether until an emergency arises.**

I have been that fat little girl, crying in the corner, last to be picked for the team. No I won't say overweight because over *what* weight – over what standards? We are all beautiful – and we can have health at every size. Fat people are less likely to break bones in accidents and some studies even show we're less likely to die if we have heart attacks. Of course, you won't hear about this from our fat-phobic media. The relationship between food and health is correlational, not causal.

## Article Two: Why we need the health at every size movement (Amii Taddleston-Burgh 2023)



While the social media health police and their unsolicited advice hurt both thin and fat people, their comments incite far more shame and stigma for fat people. Thin people get more of a pass generally, while fat people are often diagnosed by armchair medics on pictures alone and are assumed to have health conditions. We see this in the doctor's office, too: fat people are told to lose weight for just about any health issue, whereas thin people are more likely to receive actual medical care.

People are so obsessed with how much others weigh. It's the first question from some doctors – how much do you weigh? Hop up on to the scales. How about it's none of your business? People say that fat people have higher rates of hypotension – but the blood pressure cuffs at the doctors are almost always too small – and with the undignified questioning having already begun – is it any wonder that we're getting falsely high readings?

Our fat communities, such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), contest and must continue to contest society's stubborn generalizations that associate fatness with disease and poor health outcomes. We must push back against the assumption that fat people have little regard for ourselves or our own well-being. Thinking about obesity as a disease or medical risk (such as for COVID-19) contributes to stigma because it positions larger bodies as drains on our healthcare system. This just adds even further to the stigma we already suffer.

We are the most overlooked and oppressed minority. We are oppressed by society and the media (what other group of people has their body commented on as soon as they post a pic, even fully clothed) and we are the group that everyone feels justified to loudly voice their opinion on. This is why we need fat activism – this is why we need people to know that we can have health at every size.

Belong - Care - Aspire - Succeed



Often, when we are presented with completely opposing views, there is some truth lying in the middle somewhere. However, we live in a time of media sensationalism – where sensible posts often don't gain the traction they deserve.

### **DISHING OUT ADVICE**

With a partner, go through each article underlining the parts which you believe to have a good point and the parts you feel are extreme or offer poor advice.

# Need Support? You're Not Alone

If anything in today's lesson has affected you, or you want to talk to someone, there is help available.



## **Mental Health & Low Mood**

YoungMinds – <https://www.youngminds.org.uk>  
Kooth – <https://www.kooth.com>  
Mind – <https://www.mind.org.uk>

## **Talk to Someone**

Your Tutor or Head of Year – We're here to help.  
Wellbeing Team and School Nurse  
Report a Concern on Satchel  
Safeguarding Team with the Purple lanyards

## **Healthy Lifestyle**

NHS Every Mind Matters – <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters>  
Change4Life – <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

## **Apps That Can Help**

Calm – For mindfulness and sleep.  
Headspace – Meditation and stress relief.  
Clear Fear – Manage anxiety (designed for young people).  
MeeTwo – Anonymously talk to other teens, moderated by experts.

## **Eating Concerns**

Beat Eating Disorders –  
<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk>  
NHS Live Well – Eating Disorders –  
<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/eating-disorders/>