



TAKING UP SPACE

**How Eating Well & Exercising Regularly
Changed My Life**

by

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Twelve Tips for Fighting Fat Stigma

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1. Abandon the idea of “*The Perfect Weight*”

Each and every one of us is unique. Find the beauty that diversity has to offer. Belief that there is a perfect weight only limits you and others. Look deeper into the eyes of every person you encounter and look for something positive. You’ll soon realize the strength, beauty and quality each person possesses uniquely. It’s so easy to judge when the other person’s weakness is your strength.

2. Consider size as “the other diversity®.”

Expand your diversity consciousness to include body size and weight. Be conscious of *sizeism*. Explore opportunities for acceptance and inclusion. Remember, tolerance is **not** the goal. **No one wants to be “tolerated;” we all desire to be accepted and included.**

3. Develop an inclusive aesthetic.

Encourage depictions of people of size that have dignity and beauty. Keep artwork that reflects diversity in your office or home. Refuse to support entertainment that reinforces myths about people of size, and challenge providers of entertainment to be more inclusive in their offerings.

4. Do not repeat baseless or inaccurate ideas or assumptions to others.

If you didn’t do the research, it isn’t part of your personal experience, or you just don’t know how you know what you know, then don’t repeat it. Misinformation can seem legitimate just because it has been repeated so much. For example, do not mistake “thinness” for health or “fatness” for lack of health. Healthy behaviors for “all” should be the goal; i.e., walking is good for everybody, and so is eating fresh fruits and vegetables, whether dieting or not.

5. Examine humor for worn-out stereotypes.

Humor is a two-edged sword. It helps us cope, not take ourselves so seriously, and often points out the absurdity of human arrogance. But it can also reinforce and rely upon worn-out stereotypes. Two basic questions: Does it hurt others? If yes, do those others deserve to be made uncomfortable? An old adage to remember is that social change happens when we “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” Humor can be used for both those ends.

6. Respect the privacy of others by keeping questions of health, diet and exercise personal.

Health, well-being, exercise and eating are personal choices and should be regarded as private. Discussions of such things are natural among friends and might be comfortable for some, but deciding for someone else what they *should* or *should not* be doing is invading their privacy.

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Size – The Other Diversity ©

7. Design spaces to promote and respect body diversity.

Become aware of the principles of universal access/design. Consider that the way different people move in space—sit, walk, etc.—will be different and will require different designs. Include people of diverse sizes, abilities, ages and cultural backgrounds in the planning of construction and decoration, whether it be in your home, your business or your community.

8. Challenge venues that do not provide universal access.

Do not take for granted your own comfort in a particular space. Even if you don't need special accommodations, your challenge to the managers of venues that do not provide access counts. Be aware of your surroundings. If a business doesn't provide accessibility, tell them that you want them to be accessible to your larger colleagues and friends and they can earn your business by providing that. If you are a business owner, reflect upon how inclusive your business is and make changes towards providing access to everyone.

9. Include larger people in organizational and social circles.

This can be done by invitation, but it also needs to include forethought about the ways in which participation can be discouraged. For example, ordering team shirts or corporate shirts only in S-M-L-XL means that you don't want to include larger people. Having only small chairs with arms in meeting rooms implies exclusion as well. If you are at an event and there aren't any people of size present, you should ask yourself "why?" If 60-75% of all Americans are people of size, why aren't they included?

10. When planning business ventures, consider the plus-sized market as a viable part of marketing strategy.

There is no more effective way to eliminate a stigma in our capitalist society than to transform a stigmatized group into a consumer group. Products designed for larger people and advertisements geared toward larger people will create familiarity and acceptability of those larger people. This strategy will positively affect your bottom line! People of size make up the majority in this country.

11. Do not tolerate gossip, put-downs, prejudicial speech in other people.

Point out the prejudice and stigma such speech creates. Use snappy comebacks or humor to get the point across. Walk away and tell the speakers why you are walking away. Tell the speaker that you do not wish to hear what they are saying and ask them to change the subject. Just remember that apathy and silence imply consent. You've made a decision. Recall the popular commercial "**the power of one voice.**" One person's voice can raise the consciousness of many. If you speak out against fat stigma when you see it, you will make a difference for that moment in that place. Every single time a voice is raised for the inclusion of people of size, we all get a little closer to changing the stigma and creating a new attitude about fatness and fat people. You do make a difference.

12. Giving up a personal prejudice against fat is not enough.

Fat stigma should be challenged at organizational and institutional levels as well as personal levels. It is not the job of people of size to change fat stigma. If it were up to the stigmatized to change stigma, those practicing size discrimination would be given a blank check. It is up to all of us to practice inclusion. Embrace size diversity. Be aware of the many ways in which people of size are excluded from basic human activities such as work, recreation and social engagements. Challenge stigma and you can change stigma.