I want to lose weight, but I'm scared I'll lose control and become eating disordered [1]

Dear Alice,

I want to lose weight so bad. My friend said he likes me the way I am, but I'm not comfortable with myself. I want to lose the weight, but I'm also kind of scared. I'm scared that I might lose the weight and lose control. I'm scared that I might become anorexic or bulimic. What do I do?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's great that you are taking a minute to reflect on your needs, wants, and fears about your body and health. Your question brings up few different points: it sounds like you're unhappy with the way you look, you're nervous about what losing weight might mean for you, and you're frightened you'll develop an eating disorder.

First of all, it may help to remember that people can be healthy ? both physically and mentally ? in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. If your weight concerns are related to your health, rather than on how you think others view you or what you think you should look like, you can certainly adopt a nutritional and physical activity plan that will keep you fit. However, getting swept away by media images of physical beauty or other pressures is common, and as a result many people diet and exercise with the goal of attaining an often impossible (and airbrushed!) ideal. Your friend likes you for you ? why do you think that is? Making a list of the things you like about your body and yourself may help you stay focused on your health and guard against a possible movement towards unhealthy weight-loss goals.

Also remember, your weight is based on biological and physiological factors, much of which you have no control over. Ironically, the concept of control is often a central theme in the development of eating disorders. Eating disorders can be caused by myriad factors, such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, difficulty with personal relationships and expressing emotions, and glamorizing the media's portrayal of thin ideal and body perfection. Often times, individuals seek to regain control of and cope with painful emotions and experiences by harmfully restrictive and obsessive behavior practices with food, exercise, and medicine.

It might be helpful for you to continue to reflect how you feel about yourself. When you find yourself becoming critical about your body or eating behaviors, look within and ask yourself, what's really bothering you? Your answer to this simple question can help redirect your focus
and actions toward the real problem area. Maybe the root problem is school, work, relationships, or family life; focusing on the true cause of your discomfort or unhappiness, and not on your body or eating habits, may be a productive exercise. To do this, you can try keeping a daily journal to track the thoughts that are causing you to feel the way you do. Pay careful attention to the nature of your thoughts; are they self-encouraging or self-deprecating? Do you use positive or negative self-talk? Is your way of thinking about yourself flexible or limited? Identifying your thought patterns and the issues behind them will allow you to explore them further by yourself or with a counselor, psychologist, social worker, or psychiatrist. These professionals can help you manage your thoughts and actions regardless of whether you have developed an eating disorder.

If you really feel that you and your body are ready for a change, make it a healthy change; that is, focus on improving your fitness and nutrition rather than excessive-calorie counting or other quick (and often dangerous!) "fixes." That way you can judge your success by how you feel; are you more self-confident? Sleeping better? Do you feel happier and less stressed? Are you able to do activities that you couldn't before?

Before you start an eating and/or fitness program, you might consult with your health care provider. If you're a Columbia student, you can contact log in through Open Communicator or call x4-2284 to schedule an appointment with a health care provider. Many universities also house a multidisciplinary team of eating disorders specialists to help students work through their issues; Columbia students can call extension x4-1717 to leave a private voicemail message with the Eating Disorders Team. Joining a support group can be yet another tool to help alleviate your anxiety. At Columbia, Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) offers body image and eating concerns student life support groups. Call x4-2878 for details and initial group interviews.

Finally, you can also check out the following resources for additional info on body image:

- The National Women's Health Information Center ? Women's Body Image and Health web page
- About-Face
- The National Eating Disorders Association

All the best finding the support and confidence you deserve!

Alice!
Category:
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Published date:
Aug 22, 2003

Last reviewed on: