



The ideal body weight?

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Paris Hilton flashing on the television screen holding a burger that's bigger than she is does not exactly offer a message of health. And with magazine covers constantly promising that a "thinner you" will make you a popular, nay, a "better" person, how can we expect our teenage daughters to have realistic expectations of their own bodies?

Teenaged girls in our society face some of the most intensive pressure to be thin, to diet, to "look like —insert star's name here— so that she can be popular. Society's brainwashing is a powerful antidote to healthy living; it can lead to dire consequences.

At any one time, about a quarter of teen girls in Canada are "on a diet." And some three quarters are unhappy with their body image. Taken to extremes, these dieting efforts are not only unhealthy, they are dangerous.

Anorexia nervosa, for example, is starving yourself to reach a dangerously low body weight. Bulimia nervosa is a diet of binge eating followed by regurgitating. Soon enough, both of these will become life-threatening and lead to a hospital stay.

Diets like the still popular low-carb approach are not a good solution either. Reducing the intake of carbohydrates robs your body of necessary nutrients. The brain especially needs these to function properly—not a good plan when there are assignments and homework to complete.

For some, weight loss may be expected to come from a bottle of pills. These "wonders of science" usually remain untested, and certainly unapproved, by

government. And, surprise-surprise, offer fine print that suggests results will be best if taken along with a healthy eating plan and regular physical activity. Wow! And to think that healthy food and exercise could do it all on their own?!

Healthy eating need not be complicated: just follow Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. Available online or from many health units, this is a simple, effective way to make good nutrition and dietary choices.

The Guide divides food into four groups: grain products (5-12 servings daily); vegetables & fruit (5-10 servings); milk products (3-4 servings); and meat & alternatives (2-3 servings). Now, what's a serving?

The easiest way to learn what "a serving" consists of is to have a copy of the food guide handy. With a simple graphic showing examples, after only a few looks "a serving" will become second nature. For example, one slice of whole wheat bread is a serving, and a bagel is two. An average piece of vegetable or fruit (apple, banana, carrot, potato) is a serving

there. In protein, a medium egg is a serving, as are two tablespoons of peanut butter. Easy? You bet.

Physical activity, taken with healthy foods, will produce good results. More importantly, these will be lasting results. In short, "dieting" or (supposed) weight loss pills are not the solution to having the body you want to have. And please, let us agree not to use "photoshop-ed" and airbrushed magazine models as the measure of what we want to achieve!

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