

# Diet Culture



You look so good!  
Have you lost weight?

Oh I've been so bad...  
it's only 2pm and I've  
already had dessert!

**Diet culture is the concept that health means thinness and thinness means good, leading to judgments of people's worth based on their health.**

*This idea has been conditioned in us from very early on.*

**Diet culture** praises thinness and equates it to health and moral virtue. It promotes weight loss as a means of attaining higher status, which means you feel compelled to spend a massive amount of time, energy, and money trying to shrink your body – even though the research is very clear that almost no one can sustain intentional weight loss for more than a few years.

***Diet culture is a system of oppression. We are born into these biases, and it is up to us to unlearn them.***

These ideas are unhelpful, and even harmful, and often result in obsessive dieting, food restrictions, and participating in fad diets in order to achieve thinness. We are taught that dieting is a normal and a necessary part of life. This association of health with thinness, beauty, and happiness keeps us trapped in a cycle of obsessing over our bodies and spending our money on the thousands of “diet,” “health,” and “beauty” products marketed to us.

~~~~~  
**At Solid Ground, we recognize that different forms of oppression do not operate alone or within a singular system. This includes diet culture; the system of diet culture works within the systems of racism, classism, sexism, and ableism.**  
~~~~~

**However,** health and thinness are not synonymous. Research indicates that one's genetics and social determinants of health – factors such as socioeconomic status, physical environment, access to healthcare, and social networks – are a large influence on one's weight and health status. Research further shows that healthy habits such as physical activity, eating fruits and vegetables, and not smoking or drinking alcohol impacts one's health more than body weight.

## What does this have to do with food education classes?

Hunger and health disparities are not due to a lack of sufficient food, but rather to **inequities intentionally built into the food system which disproportionately impact communities of color** – including food deserts (the lack of nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables) typically found in lower-income communities and communities of color. Diet culture looks at this and implicates moral judgment of food choices on an individual level and asks: Why are you eating these “unhealthy” foods?

*At Solid Ground, we know that these inequities are systemic, and we pose another question: Why do these communities not have access to more nutrient-dense foods?*



Our Community Food Education (CFE) educates kids and adults about growing, buying, cooking, and eating nutritious foods. We recognize the ways that oppressions related to diet culture show up in our classes and seek to disrupt and challenge diet culture when it (inevitably) comes up. This is something we are constantly learning more about, and we invite you to join in the conversation with us.

## What does diet culture look like?

- Diets or dietary patterns that encourage rules about eating (not including religious rules surrounding food or eating)
- Diets or statements that give moral implication to food such as “guilty pleasure,” “cheat day,” or “clean eating”
- Statements about yourself or others about their body size, especially speaking negatively about body size
- Statements of how you/others would be happier/more successful/better if you were thinner
- Stigma about one's weight from healthcare professionals or others (which may include doctors prescribing diets instead of other interventions, or missing symptoms entirely, because they are hyper-focused on weight)

## Ways to resist diet culture in your life:

- Take a break from social media. Unfollow those who promote diet culture on social media, and follow positive body activists instead. Some of our favorites are: Virgie Tovar, Holly Finder, Michelle Allison, R.D., and Sonalee Rashatwar.
- Speak out about diet culture with whatever platforms you have, e.g., with friends and family, online, at work.
- Eat food that nourishes you and brings you joy.
- Change the language you use around food and your body (and others).
- Speak kindly to yourself.

**Solid Ground believes poverty is solvable.**

*We meet basic needs, nurture success, and spread change.*

**WEB:** [solid-ground.org/get-help/food-resources](https://solid-ground.org/get-help/food-resources)

**EMAIL:** [foodeducation@solid-ground.org](mailto:foodeducation@solid-ground.org)

