

Diet Culture

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

"You look so good! Have you lost weight?"

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

At Solid Ground, we recognize that different forms of oppression do not operate alone or within a singular system.

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This includes diet culture.
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The system of diet culture works within the systems of racism, classism, sexism, and ableism.

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 to attain 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're born into these biases, and it's up to us to unlearn them.

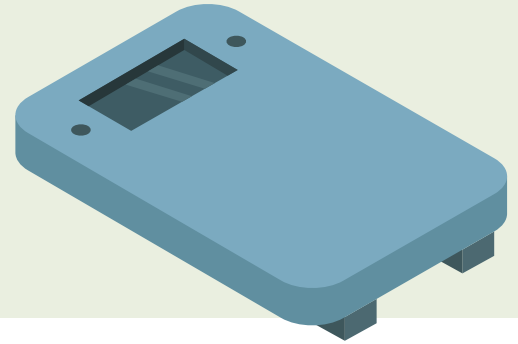
These ideas are unhelpful – even harmful – and often result in obsessive dieting, food restrictions, and participating in fad diets to try to achieve thinness. We're taught that dieting is a normal and necessary part of life. This association of health with thinness, beauty, and happiness keeps us trapped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

However, health and thinness are *not* synonymous.

Research shows that our genetics and social determinants of health – factors such as socioeconomic status, physical environment, access to healthcare, and social networks – have a large influence on our weight and health status. Research also shows that healthy habits such as physical activity, eating fruits and vegetables, and not smoking or drinking alcohol impacts our health more than body weight.

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



What does this have to do with food education classes?

Hunger and health disparities aren't due to a lack of sufficient food, but rather to **inequities intentionally built into the food system that disproportionately impact communities of color** – including “food deserts” (lack of access to nutritious foods like fruits and vegetables) typically found in lower-income communities and communities of color. Diet culture looks at this and passes moral judgment of individuals' food choices and asks: “Why are you eating these ‘unhealthy’ foods?” Our Community Food Education (CFE) team educates kids and adults about growing, buying, cooking, and eating nutritious foods. We recognize the ways that diet culture-related oppressions show up in our classes and seek to disrupt and challenge diet culture when it (inevitably) comes up. This is something we're 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 pass moral judgment on foods such as “guilty pleasure,” “cheat day,” or “clean eating”
- Speaking negatively about body size – whether it's yours or someone else's
- 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're hyper-focused on weight)



TIPS to resist diet culture:

- Take a break from social media. Unfollow people 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 however you can, such as with friends and family, online, at work.
- Eat food that nourishes you and brings you joy.
- Change the language you use around food, your body, and others.
- Speak kindly to yourself.