

INTRODUCTION

We are obsessed with our weight. All over the world, men and women obsess over numbers on a scale. We're drinking teas and using waist trainers to squeeze our midsections and weighing portions and entering everything we eat into an app that will tell us if we're over or under our calorie count for the day.

We're constantly checking the scale and the mirror. Or maybe reaching into that box or far away hanger in the closet that has that one item we used to fit into. When we fit into that pair of jeans or dress, things were good. Now we're trying to see if we're any closer to fitting into it the way we used to. Or we're using a tape measure, wrapping the slightly cold plastic around our body parts and checking how the numbers compare to last week, last month. Or yesterday.

How did we get here?

Does it matter?

Isn't the real question: *How do we make it stop?*

First, yes, it does matter how we got here because if we ignore where this started, we risk going down this road over and over again.

The journey is special to each of us, but it's also not special at all. We learn at a very young age to think that being 'small' or 'skinny' is a good thing, and, conversely, being thought of as 'fat' or 'overweight' is bad. This message is fed to us repeatedly, by friends, coworkers, family members, television, television, television and of course, social media. Yes, Instagram has entered the chat.

And then it happens.

At some point, we get the message so much, that we start to repeat it to ourselves.

'Yes,' we say to the mirror. 'If I want to be happy, I've got to have a waist that

is *that* small, or hips that are just *that* much larger than our waist, or a nicely rounded butt.’

Some of us remember those famous lines from Judy Blume:

We must...

We must...

We must increase...

And we’ve changed them or revised to whatever goal we’re working on; increase, decrease, and bust, waist or butt.

As unique as we all are, millions of us have decided being happy is connected to some idea of being ‘thin’. Being able to present the image of ourselves we want to present to the world, and that image is about a look. Maybe we just want to feel the way that skinny people feel; the feeling of having a nice shape and looking good in whatever clothes we want to wear.

In the larger scheme of our lives, this shift happens very quickly. I was telling myself those messages at the age of 11, when I started to see something wrong with my *child* body. I just wanted to be and look smaller.

The next message was clear: to achieve that goal, eat less and exercise more. From then on, I put in extra effort during gym period, made sure I worked up a sweat running and playing dodgeball and soccer. Fast forward seven or eight years. A gym moves into the neighbourhood and I’m old enough to get the first of what would be many memberships.

Let’s all admit that most gyms are weird places. They are nothing like the school gym. Instead of a wide open space where you’re allowed to run free and move your body, you’re restricted to a large space that’s filled with weird looking machines and if you want to dance or just play around, you are the weird one. Why did we do

this? Why did we decide that because we're adults now, we have to restrict what it means to work out?

It's no wonder that those of us who go to one of these weird places the first time skip the free weights and machines and go straight for the treadmills, stairs or elliptical trainers. To me, those weight machines looked like metal traps. Using them properly seemed like a mathematical equation, and one wrong move or errant elbow and it's possible I could be trapped inside them for life. At least on a cardio machine, I would be moving my body in ways I understood: Walking? Check. Climbing stairs? No problem. That thing that looks like it guides your feet in some upright, cycle motion, ie. running? Easy.

I wanted results. I didn't have time to meet with a personal trainer, even for that first free appointment, just so they could upsell me on their discount packages. If all that was required to lose weight is work out, then a an hour mindlessly watching the monitor in front of me on one of those cardio machines seemed to be the easiest option.

Dallas is a lot like me. She's achieved her goes through months of reducing her diet, and spending an hour on a cardio machine, six days a week. She hates cardio, but she doesn't talk about how much she hates it, because she's not the type to complain, instead she tries to stay focused on the good stuff: the results she's achieved so far, how blessed she feels to have a healthy body, a fridge full of food, a job she loves, etc. Then there's the music. In years of going to the gym, she's gone from using a walkman to wireless headphones connected to her phone via bluetooth. The one thing that has stayed the same is her workout.

She tried weights once, but has some non-specific reason for not sticking to it. Really, if you were to probe her about it, she'd say some of the same things I would

have said. She doesn't want to get bulky or cause some injury.

In a world obsessed with round butts, it was her arms that she noticed at first. They were thin, yes, but weak and a little... Flabby.

These messages, about health being connected to thinness, have saturated our minds. Many of us are starting to wonder if there is another way. And it's easier than ever to see the impact that just doing cardio has had on our bodies.

We're starting to understand that we have control over how we see our bodies, and the messages we get. We can ignore the family and friends who'll make comments about what we eat. We can choose what videos to watch or social media to engage with. In this book, I hope to convince you that to achieve your fitness goals, there's a whole world beyond cardio that will help you really shape the body that you want.

First, we'll dig deeper into how many fitness journeys start and why. Then look at some of the weightlifting basics. I will discuss the essential role that eating, and not just reducing calories, but possibly eating more food, plays in developing muscle and shaping your body. The next topic will be one many women are familiar with: bulk, and the connection between eating and the idea of 'getting bigger'.

In the last chapter, we'll work to expand our perception of health, fitness and what we're really aiming for in terms of health.