

Four toxic myths cause most body image, eating, fitness and weight concerns today.

Myth 1: The prescribed standard for appearance or BMI is valued over substance or integrity

What this toxic myth teaches: “How we look” or “what we weight” is more important than “who we are.” An essential criterion for the “right size” is a slim/lean body.

How it works: Mass marketing of ultra-thin role models *as if they were normal* and promotion of a “normal” BMI as if it is healthiest for everyone has been very effective in creating huge appearance anxiety and fear of fatness in individuals who naturally want to be normal, healthy, and fit in.



Myth 4: Discounting the value of health; Complacency about choices that do not result in the desired look

What this toxic myth teaches: Eat, drink and be merry... I’ll never be thin (enough) anyway!

How it works: Promising a size as the prize for a healthy lifestyle is unrealistic and a prescription for complacency about healthy choices for health’s sake. “*I did all this and all I get is health?*” “*Why eat healthy (or be active) if it won’t make me thin?*” For consolation, an array of cheap, readily available entertainment-foods and sedentary entertainment options awaits. Alternatively, “I’m already thin. What difference does it make what I eat?” is also common. Holding the “size” as the “carrot” for positive eating and fitness choices is insidiously dangerous.



Myth 2: Denial of biological diversity

What this toxic myth teaches: Anyone can be slim if they work at it. Fatter people eat too much and/or are inactive. Fat is bad/wrong and unhealthy.

How it works: For the thin-ideal to be widely embraced, biological diversity has had to be denied. Instead of accepting that weight is influenced by many factors, and that wholesome eating and fitness result in a wide range of sizes and shapes, the current norm is to mistrust the body’s ability to regulate weight if the end result is or might include visible fat.



Myth 3: Denial of the effects of restricted eating for the purpose of weight loss.

What this toxic myth teaches: Dieting is an effective weight loss strategy.

How it works: Since restrictive eating often results in short term weight loss, this is routinely presented as evidence that anyone can be slim(*mer*) if they “work at it.” “Dieting” continues to be viewed as the primary means to achieve this, even though long-term outcomes consistently show that at least 80% of weight lost through any type of weight loss plan is regained, and 1/2 to 2/3 of dieters gain additional pounds. What other prescription with a greater than 80% failure rate would still be recommended?