How do you react when someone makes a comment about eating, weight, or body shape? You do not always need to respond to “fat talk,” but sometimes a well-placed comment or more thoughtful response can clear the air or help others reconsider their attitudes.

Here are some suggestions for what to say when someone remarks...

**You look great – have you lost weight?**
- What’s looking great have to do with weight loss?
- No, but I’m happy – that’s why I look great!
- I don’t know and I don’t care – I just feel good!
- Was that supposed to be a compliment?
- No, I just look great!

**Oh, have you gained weight?**
- Does it matter?
- Why, do you like me more? less?
- Why, have you?
- Yeah, I’m healthier.

**How can you eat like that and stay so thin?**
- It’s the way my body works.
- Everyone has a different metabolism.
- People have different genetic backgrounds.
- I have to, or I’ll lose weight.

**Why are you eating so much bread and pasta?**
- My body and brain need carbohydrates for energy.
- Grain is good for you – nutrition guidelines recommend six or more servings a day.
- Because I’m healthy and don’t deprive myself of foods my body needs.

**How can you eat that? It has so much fat!**
- Low fat is fine, but zero fat isn’t healthy.
- Our bodies need dietary fat to absorb vitamins and produce hormones.
- Fat makes food yummy and helps me feel full!
- Why are you so concerned with what I eat?

**You should go on a diet!**
- Most diets don’t work.
- Diets can rob you of energy.
- Thanks, but I prefer to stay sane.
- Avoiding foods just makes you want them more and sets you up for a binge.
- Diets can turn into eating disorders.
- Who wants to spend their time worrying about food? I have better things to focus my energy on.

**I hate the way I look.**
- It’s what’s inside that counts, and I like what I see on the outside, too.
- Are you worried about something?
- Now you owe yourself some compliments.

**Look at that person. S/he shouldn’t wear that!**
- People should feel free to wear what they like.
- Judging people by their appearance is silly, isn’t it?

**Eating again? You couldn’t be hungry already!**
- Yes, I listen to my body’s hunger signals.
- Sure, my body needs fuel.

**I wish I could be like you – you’re so thin!**
- Why is being thin so important?
- Everyone’s body is different. That makes things more interesting.

**I’m so fat!**
- By what standards?
- What are you really feeling?
- You know, comments like that can hurt others as well as yourself.

**Omigosh, can my butt get any bigger?!!**
- How do you feel about yourself now?
- Let’s talk about more important things!
- I’m the wrong person to talk to about that.

**I have to go work out!**
- Exercise is best when it’s enjoyable and fun.
- Too much exercise puts stress on the muscles and immune system.

**Turn the comment into a question**

Another way to respond to a comment about weight or eating is to turn the comment into a question that reveals the underlying assumption.

Try these starters:
- Why do many people think that…?
- I wonder why appearances seem so important to some people?

Adapted with permission from Brown University Health Education
Body Image: Do’s and Don’ts

Do you and your friends focus too much on appearances? Many people use the expressions quoted here without thinking of their implications. But if we want our environment and actions to reflect our real values, rather than just outer appearances, we need to reevaluate what we say and how we judge others.

What does it mean when we make comments about weight or fat? We may be forgetting that beauty is relative. What’s more important is that our healthy bodies can do many great things for us. If we feel badly about ourselves, it’s easy to use the common excuse, “I feel fat!”—but that remark doesn’t really help us sort out our underlying feelings, and it may encourage others to worry about their bodies as well. Instead, learn to be a support to yourself and your friends with things that really matter.

Remember these points:

• Whether you think you’re overweight or underweight, you have the right to go anywhere and do anything you like, eat whatever you want in restaurants, swim, go dancing and enjoy life. If anyone makes you feel uncomfortable, it’s up to them to change, not you.

• Stand tall and relax. Move around, remembering to breathe deeply without slumping. Whatever your size, don’t tighten your muscles to hold your belly in, but insist on the right to be comfortable all the way out to your skin.

• Give your body the credit it deserves—it has gotten you this far! Allow yourself to enjoy all the things it does for you effectively, like walking, reading, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. Respect your body’s accomplishments, and others will begin doing the same.

• Sometimes a person you don’t know may say something that’s just plain nasty. Try not to take it personally. Take a deep breath and remember it’s more a statement about the narrowmindedness of the other person.

• If a person you know consistently puts you down or is otherwise bad for your self-esteem, you may need to call the person on it and insist that it stop, or find a way to spend less time with that person.

• If you feel that you are spending a lot of time worrying about your body weight, shape or size, you may find it helpful to talk with a counselor or another support person. Please review the CHEP resources listed here.

CHEP

The Cornell Healthy Eating Program (CHEP) provides high-quality, integrated medical, psychological and nutritional services under one roof at Gannett Health Services (on central campus) to address the eating problems of undergraduate and graduate students in the Cornell community. CHEP strives to help students achieve lifelong healthy eating to enhance their personal health, academic potential and overall well-being.

• Appointments
To make a CHEP appointment for yourself or for information about how to help a friend, call Gannett during regular business hours at 255-5155 and listen to the CHEP prompt.

• Website
For more detailed information about CHEP and links to other web resources, please check the web at www.gannett.cornell.edu/CHEP

Other Resources

• EARS (Empathy Assistance & Referral Service) Trained Volunteers staff a walk-in and telephone peer counseling and referral service: 255-EARS.

• The Wellness Program at Helen Newman Hall offers classes and nutrition counseling for staff and Cornell Fitness Center member: call 255-3886 or visit www.athletics.cornell.edu/wellness

• The Cornell Women’s Resource Center sponsors “Love Your Body Day” each fall: wrc.dos.cornell.edu

• The Nutrition Clinic of Elmira provides comprehensive treatment for eating disorders at their Elmira location: (607) 732-5646.

• Surviving an Eating Disorder: Strategies for Family and Friends (Siegel, Brisman & Weinshel). This helpful book is available for purchase from the Gannett cashier.

• National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) provides information and referrals: 1-800-931-2237 or www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

• About-Face provides a critical view of the portrayal of women in the media: www.about-face.org

Fall and Spring Semester Hours:
Monday–Friday 8:30 am–5:00 pm
Saturday 10:00 am–4:00pm
Sunday building closed

Check the web for hours during breaks, winter and summer sessions: www.gannett.cornell.edu

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“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”
—Eleanor Roosevelt