

Living Large, Living Healthy

Living Large is a support group for women who share a common experience — that of being fat in a society which generally does not view fatness in a positive or even neutral manner. This underlying prejudice in our society often results in negative direct or indirect consequences for large women, including the pressure to diet and difficulties undertaking healthy physical activity.

The key to health for large women is feeling good about ourselves, being physically active and eating well, rather than continuing to diet to lose weight.

There is growing evidence that the health effects associated with obesity are more often associated with inactivity rather than weight and that being fat and physically active is actually healthier than being slim and inactive⁽¹⁾. This is good news for large women who have tried unsuccessfully to lose weight through dieting or who have lost weight only to regain it.

Dieting makes you fat

For the majority of women, attempts to reign in their bodies have resulted in more weight gain. Studies show that 90% of dieters who lose weight regain it within five years and of those 95% gain more than they have lost⁽²⁾. This often results in women going on yet another and perhaps more severe diet. Yo-yo dieting, as it is referred to can be more damaging to our health than being fat.

Diets fail women

The time, energy and expense involved in the pursuit of a slimmer body can be an enormous drain on many women. The diet industry rakes in billions of dollars annually by selling a product, which has a 95% failure rate! The postponement of life until we have lost weight and the potential for the development of dangerous eating disorders are also very good reasons for women to question the wisdom of dieting.

Living Large encourages and supports women to make informed choices about dieting and respects the diverse needs and decisions of individual members.

The barriers to physical exercise for very large women are legion.

There are practical issues like getting clothing for some activities. There are the attitudes of gyms and other places to fat people participating. Very few fitness instructors have the expertise or knowledge to work adequately with very large women. There are our own feelings of incompetence and the fact that we seldom associate being physically active with fun. If we choose to exercise in public, there are often the taunts of others. The facilities are often inadequate or unsafe for large bodies. Becoming more physically active has many challenges for us all.

Living Large actively addresses these barriers by creating a safe and supportive environment for large women to undertake physical activity. What we find is that exercising together makes it more fun and less threatening. In addition, it is helping to break down lots of barriers for us and the people who work with us. We can control the pace of activities and what we do, so that we don't always feel that we are "failing" against a standard never designed for people who are large. Together we have tried aqua-aerobics, yoga and bushwalking. The group also organises regular strolls. The peer support of other large women who are getting fit has real and lasting benefits for many members who have joined gyms belly-dancing and aqua classes together.

Physical activity program for very large women

A joint project of Living Large and the YMCA has produced a Physical Activity Program for Very Large Women. The classes, which are lead by trained instructors, are safe, supportive, fun and inexpensive and are designed around our needs. They are held in two locations:

- Tuesday evenings from 6pm-7pm at Duffy Primary School
- Thursday mornings from 9.30am-10.30am at the old Hacket Primary School.

The cost per session is \$5 waged \$3 unwaged.

Living Large is currently supporting four large women to train as fitness instructors who will eventually take over the running of these groups.

Living Large is fabulous

This wonderful group of friendly women also get together for swims, dinners, sewing bees and clothes swaps. We provide support and information on many practical issues.

Living Large produce a quarterly newsletter called 'The Broadsheet'. We have a busy time ahead of us having just received funding to produce a promotional pamphlet for the group, to develop a website, to publish a Fat Friendly Goods and Services Guide for the ACT and to design an Education Package for Health Professionals. We are currently lobbying the ACT Government to include our needs in relation planning issues and to add size discrimination to the Anti Discrimination Act.

Many of us can now imagine a time soon when we will be fit and fat, where we are able to do everything physical that we want to do without having to get thin first. At an individual level, many of us already feel Living Large has enriched our lives beyond what we ever imagined. Living Large is fabulous!

To join Living Large

The group meets at 7pm on the third Wednesday of the month at the Women's Centre for Health Matters, Building 1, Pearce Community Centre, Collett Pl, Pearce.

Dinners are held on the first Wednesday of the month at various suitable venues.

To find out more about the Physical Activity Classes for Very Large Women please call The City YMCA Ph. 6249 8733.

If you would like to join Living Large or find out more about the group call the Women's Centre for Health Matters on Ph. 6290 2166 (admin) or Health Information Line Ph. 6286 2043.

References

- (1) Dieting Makes You Fat. Cannon G, Einzig H, 1983, Century, London
- (2) Fitness, Not Fatness, Is The Issue. Steven Blair, P.E.D. The Cooper Institute, Dallas Texas www.cooperinst.org

Please note: You should consult a physician before you begin any exercise program. You may also wish to consult a physiotherapist. They can help you to identify the most appropriate and safe exercise program for your level .

Notes



This Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) project has been produced by the WCHM and Living Large with funding from Healthpact