

NAAFA Newsletter

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1. I walk because I can.
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4. It helps me reconnect with my body.
5. It's empowering.
6. It's energizing.
7. It's relaxing.
8. It enhances my overall health and well-being.
9. Endorphins!
10. Walking improves my body-esteem.
11. It strengthens my heart.

Welcome to the first e-mail edition of the NAAFA Newsletter. In our last issue, which was published in print and electronic format, I said that I hoped to have regular print newsletters; however, budget constraints prohibit that at this time. The good news is that we will be e-mailing the newsletter directly to you every issue if you sign up.

• **Fear and Loathing in Los Angeles - Fat Hatred Masquerades as Concern**

by Paul F. Campos, University of Colorado Law Professor

This article and Professor Campos's keynote speech at the 2003 NAAFA Convention are both based on Chapter 5 of his forthcoming book, The Obesity Myth.



The cover of the March 2000 issue of Harper's magazine features a photograph of an artwork entitled Sundae 1, by Jeanne Dunning. The photograph is of the head and shoulders of a person of indeterminate gender, lying on his or her back. The person's face is completely smothered by an artfully stacked mound of whipped cream, topped with a cherry.

The photograph is meant to entice readers to sample "Let Them Eat Fat: The Heavy Truths About American Obesity," by Greg Critser. This particular essay is in many ways a typical representative of the sort of reportage regarding fat and fat-related issues that appears on an almost daily basis in the nation's major newspapers and large-circulation magazines. The basic thesis of such stories is almost always the same: Americans are eating themselves to death. Yet readers of these stories who remain willing to look just below their surface of alarmist claims and distorted statistics will often find evidence of things a good deal more disturbing than the number of calories in a double Whopper with cheese.

The text itself opens with what the author clearly intends to be a shocking and horrifying tableau: In the intensive care unit of the University of Southern California's medical center in downtown Los Angeles, a 22-year-old man whom Critser names "Carl" is being intubated, while surgeons "labor to save his life." Critser informs us that Carl weighs 500 pounds. The author then quotes the patient's mother: "Second time in three months," [she] blurted out to me as she stood apart watching in horror. 'He had two stomach staplings, and they both came apart. Oh my God, my boy . . .' Her boy was suffocating in his own fat."

12. It helps me [avoid/control my] diabetes.
13. It helps me sleep better.
14. It helps keep me on an even keel emotionally.
15. It makes food taste better.
16. I get to see, hear, and smell beautiful sights, sounds, and smells.
17. Walking outdoors fills my lungs with fresh air.
18. It's fun!

Regional Resources
by Bill Weitze,
Newsletter Editor

One new project announced at the NAAFA Convention this past August was the creation of regional resource books. In the past, various individuals and chapters have had lists of fat-friendly doctors, theaters with adequate seating, and so on. However, these have been scattered and not centrally organized. The goal of this project would be to collect, either online, in printed books, or both, these sorts of lists, and keep them updated using volunteers from NAAFA chapters around the country (and, eventually, around the world).

The next step is yours. I'm not asking you write the books (not just yet, anyway), but I'd like you to tell me what sorts of things you want in these books. And, of course, if you do have something specific to go into a regional book, please send it to me.

Once we get this up and running, we'll have regional

Critser's readers are never told what medical condition has occasioned this emergency, and it turns out that "suffocating in your own fat" does not constitute a recognized medical diagnosis. There are, in fact, thousands of people of roughly similar size in America today (I've met some of them), and very few are in any sort of life-threatening condition.

Critser goes on to cite the usual scare statistics about an "obesity epidemic" in America, before offering up choice quotes from former Surgeon General David Satcher and William Dietz, the director of nutrition at the Centers for Disease Control. Up to this point, Critser's essay has been pretty standard stuff. Typical newspaper and magazine articles on fat are generally worse than worthless: Such stories accept without question the gross distortions and outright lies from the medical and pharmaceutical establishment, who profit directly from the constant escalation of the war on fat.

In the face of so much spurious anti-fat propaganda, the following facts tend to elicit among even the best-informed audiences: Most fat people are not, on the whole, less healthy or more prone to premature death than non-fat persons. Even very fat people have better health, on average, than fashionably thin people. Fat active people have half the mortality rate of thin sedentary people. Levels of physical activity are vastly better predictors than body mass of both mortality and overall health. Many of the nation's leading experts on diet and health issues consider underweight to be a more serious health problem in America than overweight. In the words of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the case for the claim that fat is a significant health risk is "limited, fragmentary and often ambiguous."

Anyway, back to "Let Them Eat Fat." Critser thinks he has found, on the streets of Los Angeles, the answer to his question regarding how Americans can be so health-conscious and so fat at the same time. In what Critser describes as "the heart of the San Fernando valley's burgeoning Latino population," Critser attends the opening of a new Krispy Kreme doughnut store, and witnesses scenes that he describes in something akin to the tone of a Victorian missionary confronting the savage rituals of the natives, somewhere deep within the heart of darkness.

Critser interviews the manager of the store, who touches on the elaborate marketing strategies that go into choosing the location of a new Krispy Kreme outlet: "The idea is simple - accessible but not convenient . . . We want them intent to get at least a dozen before they even think of coming in." Critser asks the manager who these prospective marketing targets might be. "He gestured to the stout Mayan donas queuing around the building. 'We're looking for all the bigger families.'" "Bigger in size?" Critser asks with what appears to be an almost pornographic air of fascination. "'Yeah.' [The manager's] eyes rolled, like little glazed crullers. 'Bigger in size.'"

The full flavor of what follows cannot be appreciated without extensive quotation.

contacts for you for each part of the country (and world), but for now, go ahead and send your input to me, Bill Weitze, at newsletter@naafa.org.

**Announcing the
Volunteer Spotlight
by Bill Weitze,
Newsletter Editor**

Starting with the next issue, we will be spotlighting a volunteer effort in each issue. The plan is to highlight effective and fun events, demonstrations, and outreach efforts by NAAFA chapters and other groups. Please forward information about any effort your group did that you think the rest of NAAFA should know about. Send your input to me, Bill Weitze, at newsletter@naafa.org.

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"At my local McDonald's, located in a lower-middle- income area of Pasadena, California, the supersize bacchanal goes into high gear at about 5 P.M., when the various urban caballeros, drywalleros, and jardineros get off from work and head for a quick bite. Mixed in is a sizeable element of young black kids traveling between school and home, their economic status apparent by the fact that they've walked instead of driven. Customers are cheerfully encouraged to 'supersize your meal!' by signs saying, 'If we don't recommend a supersize, the supersize is free!' For an extra seventy-nine cents, a kid ordering a cheeseburger, small fries and a small coke will get said cheeseburger plus a supersize Coke (42 fluid ounces versus 16, with free refills) and a supersize order of french fries (more than double the weight of a regular order). Suffice it to say that consumption of said meals is fast and, in almost every instance I observed, very complete."

You would think the author had been watching teenagers exchange sexual favors for crack cocaine, given the text's mixture of salacious detail and horrified sanctimoniousness. Critser goes on to agonize over the contents of the "jumbo dietetic horror" he has witnessed, and to describe the "endocrine warfare" he believes is sure to erupt in the bodies of the wretched refuse of our teeming shores who engage in such flagrant self-abuse. Then he really lets us know what he thinks:

If childhood obesity truly is 'an epidemic in the U.S. the likes of which we have not had before in chronic disease,' then places like McDonald's and Winchell's Donut stores, with their endless racks of glazed and creamy goodies, are the San Francisco bathhouses of said epidemic, the places where the high-risk population indulges in high-risk behavior. Although open around the clock, the Winchell's near my house doesn't get rolling until seven in the morning, the Spanish-language talk shows frothing in the background while an ambulance light whirls atop the Coke dispenser. Inside, Mami placates Miguelito with a giant apple fritter. Papi tells a joke and pours ounce upon ounce of sugar and cream into his 20-ounce coffee. Viewed through the lens of obesity, as I am inclined to do, the scene is not so *feliz*.

"The obesity rate for Mexican-American children," Critser continues, "is shocking." He returns to the scene of the ongoing doughnut crime: "The lovely but very chubby little girl tending to her schoolbooks . . . will begin puberty before the age of ten, launching her into a lifetime of endocrine bizarreness that will not only be costly to treat but will be emotionally devastating as well." Critser doesn't need to add that all this "bizarreness" will also give her a big head start over all those anorexic (and therefore infertile) white girls in the nicer parts of Pasadena, in the Darwinian struggle to produce the next generations of (respectively) Krispy Kreme junkies and Diet Coke addicts.

To be fair, Critser doesn't really want to focus on what he calls "the inevitable divisiveness of race and gender." He wants to talk about the relationship between fat and social class. On this topic, he actually makes a certain degree of sense. He notes that, in American today, the poor are fat

and the rich are not - and he even considers the possibility that the rich would like to keep things that way. "In upscale corporate America," he notes, "being fat is taboo, a sure-fire career-killer. If you can't control your own contours, goes the logic, how can you control a budget and staff? Look at the glossy business and money magazines with their cooing profiles of the latest genius entrepreneurs: to the man, and the occasional woman, no one, I mean no one, is fat."

One would hope that a journalist confronting a situation such as this - in which a physical characteristic was being used to systematically disenfranchise a significant portion of the citizenry from the upper echelons of money and power - would display a modicum of curiosity about whether the things the people with the money and power were saying about the supposed awfulness of that physical characteristic were actually true. But, at this moment in America, when it is no longer possible to observe that a glossy brochure contains no pictures of women, or non-whites, without being expected to wonder if there's a legitimate reason for that absence, it is still possible - no, it is almost obligatory - to assume there is a good reason for excluding fat people.

It would be difficult to come up with a better illustration of the distorting power of the war on fat than Critser's explanation for why Americans - specifically poor and working class Americans - are getting fatter, when being fat has so clearly become an enormous social disadvantage. According to Critser, it's because America's elites have been afraid to say or do anything to signal social disapproval of fat. Cowed by, among others, "a very vocal minority of super-obese female activists . . . the media, the academy, public health workers, and the government do almost nothing" to let Americans know that being fat is undesirable. This hypothesis, of course, is simply insane on its face.

In America today, it is impossible for anyone above the age of about five -- recent news reports indicate that fat anxiety is becoming common among six to eight-year-olds -- to somehow miss the fact that power and privilege in all of its forms are associated with thinness, and, especially in the case of women, unhealthy extremes of thinness. Go into any supermarket, look at any magazine rack, glance at any television screen, visit any movie theater, enter any office building, peruse any glossy entrepreneurial profile -- indeed, walk down a city street with your eyes open, and you will get the message. What's amazing is that, as we have seen, Critser gets the message loud and clear when he recognizes that thinness and economic privilege are closely connected in our culture - and yet he instantly forgets this fact when he attempts to explain why the have-nots are getting so much fatter.

His thesis that "those with true cultural power, those in the academy and the publishing industry who have the ability to shape public opinion" have been so cowed by feminists and the like that they display a systematic "reluctance to face [the] facts" about fat is, under the circumstances, nothing less than bizarre. After all, Critser's essay itself manages to remain almost fact-free in regard to the obesity debate

(indeed, he seems unaware that there is a debate) precisely because it is a product of a cultural atmosphere in which investigative journalists writing for high-profile magazines have been so thoroughly brainwashed about the supposed health risks of fat that they don't even bother to engage in the most cursory investigation of their topic.

Critser concludes on an apocalyptic note:

What do the fat, darker, exploited poor, with their unbridled primal appetites, have to offer us but a chance for we diet-and-shape-conscious folk to live vicariously? Call it boundary envy. Or, rather, boundary-free envy . . . Meanwhile, in the City of Fat Angels, we lounge through a slow-motion epidemic. Mami buys another apple fritter. Papi slams his second sugar and cream. Another young Carl supersizes and double supersizes, then supersizes again. Wastelines surge. Any minute now, the belt will run out of holes.

If one were forced to come up with a six-word explanation for the otherwise inexplicable ferocity of America's war on fat, it would be this: thin people find fat people disgusting. Critser's article is merely an unusually clear example of the commonplace social process by which a visceral reaction is transmuted into an aesthetic judgment, which in turn becomes a series of (imaginary) facts about the relationship weight and health.

Fifty years ago, America was full of people that someone like Critser could consider with open disgust: blacks in particular, of course, but also other ethnic minorities, the poor, women, Jews, homosexuals, and so on. Yet over the last half-century, the classes of candidates available for open pariah status have gradually shrunk. This has become a problem on at least two levels. As many a vulgar social psychologist has (correctly) observed, societies need pariahs. In most cultures, some class of people is more or less required to play the role of those who make everybody else feel better, for no better reason that we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that we are not they. Furthermore, the feelings of disgust elicited in others by traditional pariah-class individuals do not simply disappear as soon as it becomes no longer acceptable to express those feelings openly.

As The Handbook of Obesity notes (Critser himself cites this precise quote): "In heterogeneous and affluent societies such as the United States, there is a strong inverse correlation of social class and obesity, particularly for females." In other words, on average, poor people in America are fat, and rich people are thin. A strong correlation also exists between obesity and ethnic minority status -- one that goes beyond the class correlation itself. Particularly among African American women, changing class status does not appear to strongly influence obesity rates (in America, the demographic group with the highest obesity rate is that comprised of black women in their 50s). Critser notes this, as well, and muses that some observers might claim "black women find affirmation for being heavy from black men, or believe themselves to be 'naturally'

heavy." He then adds prissily that "such assertions do not change mortality statistics."

But Critser gives no evidence of having looked at - or at any rate understood - any mortality statistics whatsoever. If he had, he might have discovered that, in regard to African American women in particular, those studies that have looked into just this question have been unable to determine that body mass has any predictable effect on the health and longevity of such women- even up to a BMI of 59 (A 5' 8" woman with a BMI of 59 weighs almost 400 pounds).

Yet the disgust the thin upper classes feel for the fat lower classes has nothing to do with mortality statistics, and everything to do with feelings of moral superiority engendered in thin people by the sight of fat people. Precisely because Americans are so repressed about class issues, this disgust must be projected onto some other distinguishing characteristic. In 1852, an upper class Englishman could be quite unselfconscious about the fact that the mere sight of the urban proletariat disgusted him. In 2002, any upper class white American liberal would be horrified to imagine that the sight of say, a lower class Mexican-American woman going into a Wal-Mart might somehow elicit feelings of disgust in his otherwise properly sensitized soul. But the sight of a fat woman going into Wal- Mart . . . ah, that is something else again.

Seen in this light, the almost pornographic quality of Critser's descriptions of fat people eating fast food begins to make sense. For what Critser calls "diet-and- shape-conscious folk," a Krispy Kreme doughnut is not just a doughnut: it is a fetishistic, almost magical object, with the power to contaminate and transform those who allow themselves to be seduced by its quasi- erotic charms. Each bite of that doughnut, each moment of weakness that tempts us to supersize those fries, or to surrender to the orgiastic frenzy in which we imagine little Miguelito and the millions like him greedily rip apart their enormous apple fritters, pushes us closer toward death - and toward something even worse.

Jared Diamond has noted that as societies become more complex, they almost always become more sedentary, bureaucratic and hierarchical. In America today, we are generally quite sensitive to the reality of the first two phenomena, while ignoring or denying the presence of the third. But who can deny that, in a nation where, as Critser himself puts it, "no one, and I mean no one" in the pages of the glossy magazines within which the elite project their image of themselves is anything like fat, the hierarchy of acceptable body types has become more rigid, exclusive and well- defined than ever before?

The image on the cover of Harper's is not merely, in one sense, pornographic: it is fraught with implications of death. A woman to whom I showed the image to illustrate the concept of "food porn" commented that it was also, as she put it, an image of "death by sundae." And indeed, when seen through the lens of the anxieties of the upper classes in America today - when seen through the eyes of we who

are afraid of being enveloped, smothered, crushed and most of all contaminated by the rippling mountains of fat cascading down the bodies of our social inferiors - the message of Sundae I becomes quite clear: Eat fat and die. Or worse yet: become one of them.

- **The State of NAAFA**

**by Frances M. White,
NAAFA Secretary
Delivered at the 2003
NAAFA Convention,
August 9, 2003.**

Good evening. This is the 33rd annual NAAFA convention. This is the time we give the State of NAAFA address. Frankly, the state of NAAFA is not as good as it has been in previous years.

Like many other non-profit groups, our donations went down after 9-11. But ours have gone down over 70%. It has become obvious that in order to survive, NAAFA will have to change the way it operates. We have a wonderful web site, thanks to our chair, Conrad Blickenstorfer. We need to expand our web presence to continue our mission of providing education, support and advocacy to people all sizes of large.

We have a wonderfully cohesive Board of Directors, including Conrad, David and Kara Allen and me. We've even received an application to join the Board from someone full of energy and ideas, Steven Everett. Steven was responsible for getting the items for "The Not So Silent Auction" on which we made over \$10,000 this afternoon! And we have the greatest Executive Administrator in Maryanne Bodolay, who was responsible for putting together this wonderful convention.

How will NAAFA change? While we are going to close the office in Sacramento, many people will not notice much of a change. We will keep our regular phone number, our 800 number, our box number and our e-mail address. NAAFA is in the rolodexes of media representatives all over the U.S. and overseas. In fact, when the press releases hit about the size- positive resort in Cancun, everyone called NAAFA to find out if the resort was legitimate and what NAAFA thought about the resort.

But most important of all is that there will be a convention next year. Maryanne Bodolay has received nibbles from hotels in the New York area and elsewhere on the East Coast. It may not be on the scale of previous Conventions. But you must remember that the first Convention NAAFA held was a two-hour deli lunch in midtown Manhattan.

To do the work of NAAFA, we will have to rely on a network of key volunteers to run specific tasks and act as regional



referral agents for the people who contact NAAFA about different issues. Friday afternoon, at the Think Tank meeting, many stepped up to the plate to offer their services. These included Bill Weitze, who wants to continue editing the Newsletter that you'll be able to read on the web site; Lenë Whitney-Putz, who plans to do a workshop at next year's convention about how to target college students with our message; and Mary Ray Worley, who has ideas about starting a size- positive reading club and getting NAAFA flyers out to community events like Farmer's Markets and Jazz festivals. We also expect to receive offers from independent contractors to do specific projects relating to advocacy issues.

These are only a few of the talented people we have in NAAFA. Don't be afraid to contact us with some of your ideas. Continue to participate in the Discussion Board on NAAFA's web site. Change, consistent with NAAFA's mission statement, will come slowly as in most non-profit organizations. But it is important that you communicate your ideas.

We need to make more effective use of our scarce resources. Change can be difficult but without change, we wither rather than thrive. Rather than thinking of the NAAFA, as you knew it, as ending, think of NAAFA as evolving.

- - - - - Update, December 2003

What is happening now? There have been some changes since I made this speech at the Convention.

The office officially closed on November 30, 2003. The homes and offices of those who helped with the closure now look like libraries, or office supply stores or storage warehouses when places needed to be found for the supplies and archives of NAAFA.

Stephen Everett decided not to accept a position on the Board. However, we've added two people to the Board you may remember from the Convention - Laura Wills, who worked on Registration, and Carole Cullum, who spoke at the Farewell Breakfast and with whom several of us were privileged to work on establishing the anti-size discrimination resolution added to the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco. And we hope to add more people to carry our message of support and advocacy for people all sizes of large farther afield.

My heart swells every time the mainstream world picks up on a message NAAFA has promoted over the years. Check out our web site for the FTC press conference on 12-09-03 about the fraudulent ads for diet products. I'm glad the FTC is paying attention, but where was it 20 years ago? Next, we have to work against the idea that there is a surgical solution to the "obesity epidemic." With your help, we will make the world a safer place for fat people.

- **Walking Fat and Proud**

Putting Pizzazz into Your Walking Program
by *Mary Ray*

**Worley
(pictured,
right)**



1. Be safe. Don't walk alone at night or in unsafe or unfamiliar neighborhoods. Always carry a personal I.D. with you and enough change for a phone call.

2. Wear shoes that fit you well and have plenty of cushioning and support. Go to a shoe store where the salespeople really know about athletic

shoes and will measure your feet each time you buy shoes so that you always get a good fit. Try to buy your shoes toward the end of the day, because your feet may swell over the course of the day. Consider buying two pairs of athletic shoes at a time. Alternating days so that each pair has a chance to rest between walks may increase the durability of the shoes. Buy a brand (like New Balance) whose shoes come in varying widths, not just "regular" and "wide," and make sure you get the right width for you. For women this will sometimes mean wearing men's shoes. If they fit well, so what if they're men's? Wear those shoes only for your walking routine. Walking shoes lose their cushioning and support in a big hurry, so plan to buy new ones every four to six months, even when you're buying two pair at a time.

3. Wear comfortable clothing. Don't be afraid to wear shorts and a sleeveless tee-shirt (I get mine at MakingItBigOnline.com). You'll be amazed at how wonderful it feels not to be overheated in long pants and sleeves. Wear sunscreen and insect repellent if you need them. Wear a hat with a brim and sunglasses if it's sunny out.

4. Hydrate! Drink plenty of water before, during, and after your walks. It will help you feel more energetic and keep your system functioning well. If anything, large people need more water than their average-size counterparts, so shoot for drinking more than 8 glasses (64 ounces) a day.

5. Don't be afraid to sweat. Many of us were taught when we were growing up that "women do not sweat-they perspire." Horse feathers! Real women are strong and powerful-and you can bet that they sweat. Wear a sweatband or bandana around your head so the sweat doesn't get in your eyes, and carry an extra bandana so you

can wipe your face when you need to. Your body manufactures muscles-and power-out of sweat (well, indirectly anyway).

6. Walk proud. Walk with your head up and look about 10 to 15 feet ahead of you, and throw your shoulders back-just as if you were proud of your body and, if you're a woman, proud of your breasts. Habitually looking down when you're walking can put strain on your upper body. Walking tall and holding your head up will enhance your posture and your self- confidence. Be proud of yourself and the relationship you're forging with your body.

7. Start out small and slow, and then begin adding to your walk. Shoot for 3 to 5 times per week to begin with. Start out with whatever you can manage. Starting with 5 minutes is just fine. FIT-Frequency, Intensity, and Time. All three are important, but frequency is the most important. Notice that speed and distance are not part of the acronym. They are a byproduct of the first three. Begin by focusing on frequency and gradually increase your frequency, the intensity of your walks (how hard you are working), and the time you spend walking. Be very, very patient with yourself.

8. If you are having trouble working in 30 minutes of walking a day, walk for 10 minutes 3 times a day. You'll get the same benefit.

9. Set realistic goals for yourself. Start out doing what you can for two weeks. Don't push yourself too hard at first. Even just 5 or 10 minutes a day is fine. Then increase your time, say, in 5-minute increments, for two or three of your walks during the third week. When you feel ready, increase your time again. You will undoubtedly have days when you feel more energetic, and days when you have more time than others. Shoot to walk for longer periods of time on the days when you're feeling more energetic and when you have more time. Keep setting goals for yourself based on what you are doing and how much you've been able to improve in the past.

10. Alternate hard days and easy days. And eventually you may want to walk longer on your easy days and shorter on your hard days. For example, for two days a week I walk as fast as I can for 30 minutes, and for two days a week I walk at a less strenuous pace for 1 hour.

11. Consider keeping records. Write down not only what you've done but also how you feel about your walking. Put dots on your calendar to keep track of frequency. It's fun and encouraging to see the progress you're making. You may also want to keep track of how far you walk over the course of a year. Written records provide objective feedback about how you're doing. Always be very patient with yourself.

12. It is unlikely that you will always be able to avoid discouragement, but try not to give in to it. Remember that the learning curve is never a straight line. You will have good days and bad, and even good weeks and bad, and sometimes your good months and bad. Consider obstacles and setbacks part of the journey. Don't judge yourself

harshly. Pat yourself on the back for trying again and again. The only failure is giving up. Be very, very patient with yourself.

13. If you find that things aren't going very well for a while, do something different to liven up your routine. Walk in a different place, ask a supportive friend or family member to walk with you, buy new athletic shoes, enlist the help of a personal trainer for a while to get you jumpstarted again, journal about how walking makes you feel. This list more or less assumes that walking is a great activity for just about everyone, but maybe you'll have more success if you add other activities to the mix, like water aerobics or line dancing. Experiment and find out what activities delight you. You may find that walking enhances your other activities and vice versa.

14. Write down the reasons why you are walking and put them up somewhere so you can see them every day.

15. Find a buddy (or buddies) to walk with one or more times a week. Enlist social and emotional support from your friends and family. Our culture doesn't support large people in their efforts to get moving, so work to find yourself the support you need.

16. If you're adventurous, get yourself clothing that is appropriate for walking in the rain or snow (you can get rain pants from Junonia.com). If you're not so adventurous, come up with alternative places to walk when it's raining or snowing (like the mall or a health club). Try not to let minor things like weather interfere with your momentum.

17. During the summer, avoid walking during the hottest part of the day. Instead, walk during the early morning or late afternoon. Walking when it's too hot and humid can sometimes result in heat exhaustion. Especially when you're sweating, be sure to drink plenty of water.

18. Walk on dirt paths if your feet get sore. Also be sure to wear shoes that fit you well and that have plenty of cushioning and support.

19. Turn off the headset. Use your walking time to work on your relationship with your body. Tune in to how the different parts of your body feel while you're walking. Cultivate gratitude for all the things your body does for you. Repeat body-positive affirmations as you walk. "I'm strong, I'm brave, I'm beautiful, I'm powerful!" "I have a great luscious voluptuous body!"

20. Or turn on the headset, if you find that listening to music makes your walk more enjoyable. Just don't tune out your body. Pay attention to how everything feels. Reinforce your mind-body connections.

21. Get some variety in your scenery: Become familiar with all the parks and trails in your area. Pick some that are especially good for hard days and some that are better for easy days.

22. Consider getting a heart rate monitor to track your cardiovascular fitness. Polar heart rate monitors

(www.polarheartratemonitors.com) can be ordered with a large-size elastic band.

23. Consider getting walking poles (www.exerstrider.com) to get your upper-body muscles involved in your walking, to take pressure off of your lower body (especially your knees), to help improve your posture.

24. Consider getting a pedometer so you always know how far you've walked. Attach the pedometer to your shoes so you can track how much you walk every day. Then you can gradually increase the number of steps you take every day.

25. If you're keeping track of how many miles you walk, keep a running tally so that at the end of a year you know how many miles you walked that year. It will give you a great sense of accomplishment.

26. Warm up for about 5 minutes at the beginning of your walk, cool down for about 5 minutes at the end, and then stretch for 5 to 15 minutes. Stretching is a special time to listen to and pay attention to your body. It's a lot like giving yourself a massage, and baby, don't you deserve it! Luxuriate in your stretching, as if you were a cat. Stretching helps you to avoid injury and to avoid tightness in muscles that may be waking up after long disuse. Never stretch muscles that aren't warmed up. Stretch your calves to avoid plantar fasciitis. If you've ever had it, you know it's worth avoiding!

27. Make walking fun! If it's a chore, if it's torture, you won't do it. If it's fun, you're much more likely to do it regularly.

28. Don't avoid hills! When you first start taking on hills, pick relatively small ones and don't be afraid to go very slowly. Be very patient with yourself. Walking uphill has tremendous payoffs in cardiovascular fitness. It also helps to stretch out your calves, ankles, and feet and therefore helps you avoid plantar fasciitis. And besides, the view from the top will be worth it!

29. Talk with people about your walking program. Don't be afraid to brag. Talking reinforces the changes you're making in your life and generates social support. If people assume you're walking to lose weight, set them straight right away. You're doing it because it's fun, because it feels good, because it's empowering and energizing, because it helps you feel good about yourself.

30. Don't just walk, be a walker (just like people who run are runners). It's not just what you do, it's who you are. If you've never thought of yourself as an athlete before, change your mind about who you are. Who says you can't be an athlete?

31. Read inspiring books: Great Shape: The First Fitness Guide for Large Women, by Pat Lyons and Debby Burgard; Real Fitness for Real Women by Rochelle Rice; The Complete Guide to Walking by Mark Fenton; The Spirited Walker by Carolyn Scott Kortge

32. Be very, very patient with yourself. Progress may be slow in coming, but it will come if you are dedicated and persistent. Enjoy the journey!

- **Protesting the "Walk from Obesity"**

As we've seen in this issue, walking is a wonderful exercise, with great benefits to health and well being. What's not so wonderful is when the weight loss industry co-opts this activity to sell weight loss surgery. Sponsored by the American Society of Bariatric Surgeons, the "Walk from Obesity" event was held on September 20 in 38 cities throughout the United States. Bariatric surgeons are those who perform weight loss surgery, a set of elective procedures that kills anywhere from 1 to 5% of patients, counting only deaths immediately during and after the operation.



In several cities, NAAFA members protested the Walks to show that there's a better way: self- acceptance and a healthy lifestyle at any size. Here's what they did in three cities.

San Francisco, Crissy Field **by Marilyn Wann**

It was a ton of fat fun in a big green field. John the Ranger welcomed us to the First Amendment zone of the park. Lisa Tealer led people in fun aerobics. The Bod Squad did cheers in full costume and full voice. ("Staples are for paper, not for people! Rah! Rah!") Sally Pugh's yoga class looked totally blissful. (She's starting an SF class soon!) Marina Wolf and the Phat Fly Girls busted some moves. And all sorts of fabulous people of all sizes and ages (including 6-month-old Gwinna) showed up for beachball bouncing and ribbon twirling and attempts at kite flying. (Note to self: Hot days mean no wind.)

I didn't do an exact count, but we could easily have outnumbered the "Walk from Obesity" participants. We handed out information to a bunch of people. Plus, several people had extended conversations with "Walk from Obesity" participants. All in all, it was a gorgeous day and a great event!

San Diego **by Cathy Miller**

About a dozen NAAFA members and allies held a rally at the "Walk From Obesity" in San Diego. We had a huge banner, about 20 feet long, that proclaimed in huge letters: "Bypass the bypass, say NO to WLS." Many of us carried signs, such as "Revise Your Mind, NOT Your Body", "Safe Surgery? FAT CHANCE!", etc. There was one 13 year old girl with us who was ready to take on the entire WLS community all by

herself! She was wonderful, I wish we could clone her! When us older folks' voices wore out, she was out there doing cheers all by herself.

Sandie Sabo made up a terrific 12 page packet of information, great stuff, we handed out at least 20. It amazed us how many average sized folks (not connected with the walk, just visiting the park) came up to us, congratulated us for being there, lent their vigorous support against WLS, and took our informational packet. We may not have been huge in numbers, but were overflowing with spirit and conviction.

New York City, Riverside Park by Sandy Schaffer

Roughly 20 happy fat folk from The National Organization for Lesbians of Size (NOLOSE) and NAAFA rallied in Riverside Park to offer an alternative to the Walk from Obesity and WLS - we showed the walkers (and curious bystanders) how to love your body instead! Becca Widom from NOLOSE organized a Yay Station with a scale that read "glorious", "beautiful", "delightful" instead of displaying a weight, and we invited everyone who walked by to get "yay-ed". It was amazing how many people didn't want to step on the scale even without a number; it was even more gratifying to see the smiles on peoples faces when they got a compliment instead of a judgment.

Some of us passed out flyers with Scary Surgery Stats, while others held signs that read "I love my fat body!" or performed cheers of "2, 4, 6, 8, we do not regurgitate!" While some of the walkers seemed put off by our presence, we were never anything less than completely respectful of the walkers themselves and engaged them in dialogue. Many of the park visitors who happened to come by offered unexpected - and wonderful! - support and encouragement for our message of loving our bodies healthy and whole. One man riding his bicycle stopped in front of the Yay Station, looked at us for a moment and turned to say, "just remember - thin may be in, but fat is where its at!"

- **A Positive Body Image for Fat Children**

**by Joanne P. Ikeda, MA, RD
Co-Director; Center for Weight
and Health; University of
California, Berkeley**

At our Center for Weight and Health, we have adopted a philosophical basis for our programs. By developing tenets for this philosophical basis, we are attempting to do much good and no harm in terms of the broad definition of health as physical, social and psychological well-being. I would like to share these tenets with you and explain why we think they are important.



"We celebrate differences in body size and shape among children and adults."

This tenet recognizes that human beings come in a variety of sizes and shapes, and acknowledges the uniqueness of each human body. It helps children and adolescents reject the pressures they feel to be thin and have the "perfect body." It is important for adults to point out that there is no such thing as a "perfect body." Teen magazines often promote thin, anorexic bodies as "perfect bodies" for girls and women, while boys and men are supposed to have broad shoulders and "6-pack abs." These images promote body dissatisfaction in the vast majority of youngsters whose bodies don't look like the air brushed pictures. Overweight kids are especially at risk for body dissatisfaction because their bodies deviate so greatly from these "perfect bodies." Adults need to point out that many of the bodies featured in both adult and teen fashion and body builder magazines are not real bodies. They are often composites of different bodies put together with the use of a computer!

"We promote body satisfaction, high self-esteem, and a positive body image for children and adults."

This tenet focuses on psychological well-being, an important aspect of health. Children worry about their bodies. They worry that their bodies might not turn out "okay" and there might be something wrong with their bodies. This concern is amplified when youngsters are going through puberty and their bodies are changing rapidly. Kids need to know that these changes are natural, healthy, and are happening as a result of normal growth and development. They need to be assured that their bodies are going to turn out just fine.

By the end of adolescence, teenagers should feel positive about their bodies and believe that they have "good" bodies. We also want teenagers to enter young adulthood with high self-esteem and a positive body image. We know that low self-esteem is related to an entire host of problems from substance abuse to school drop out rates and that body dissatisfaction is the most consistent predictor of eating disorders.

Unfortunately, recent research has found that many children are not happy with their bodies. A study conducted at Stanford looked at body image and body satisfaction among third grade children. The children they studied attended elementary school in Northern California. The sample was multi-racial representing California's diverse population. The results were quite disconcerting:

- 35% of all girls wanted to lose weight
- 26% of all boys wanted to lose weight

"We view all bodies as good bodies. There is no such thing as a bad body."

Sadly, many overweight children think of their bodies in negative terms and may even describe their bodies as "bad bodies." They believe that there is something inherently

wrong with their bodies that can't be fixed. Promising a large child that if s/he changes eating and activity patterns, then s/he will achieve the "ideal" or "perfect" body is a denial of the possibility that this child is meant to be large and may end up being a large adult. It also reinforces the notion that having a big body is a bad thing. As stated in our first tenet, human beings come in a wide range of sizes - there will always be those who fall at the extremes of the size spectrum. Discriminating against these individuals is inherently unfair since no one chooses their body size.

Overweight children need to be assured that their bodies are "good" bodies. They need to be told that sometimes bad things happen to our bodies. We may become ill; we may have an accident, or we may fail to take care of our bodies. Luckily our bodies are very resilient and can usually be healed.

"We respect the bodies of others even though they might be different from our own. We encourage children to demonstrate respect for the bodies of others."

A teacher once asked me, "If I demonstrate respect for a fat child, then I am saying it is okay for this child to be fat. Shouldn't I let overweight parents and their children know that I don't think it is okay for them to be fat?" Somehow this teacher had gotten the notion that she was motivating or helping parents and children change their eating and exercising behaviors by letting them know that she didn't approve of their body size or shape. It was obvious to me that this teacher had never realized that treating children or adults disrespectfully does not empower them to adopt healthier lifestyles. In fact, it does just the opposite. It lowers their self-esteem so the individual feels helpless and hopeless about their potential to change.

Parents of overweight children need to speak up when a child is discriminated against based on body size. Children should not be teased, harassed or treated like social outcasts because they are fat. If this happens at school, it is up to the school administration and the teachers to put a stop to it. If it happens at home, then parents need to state that it is disrespectful behavior and will not be tolerated. If it happens in a social setting, the offender needs to be taken aside and warned that you and your child will leave unless this behavior stops immediately.

"We believe that approaches to decreasing pediatric overweight must be based on sound scientific research."

I have had an academic appointment at the University of California, Berkeley, for over 33 years. In that time I have witnessed tremendous changes in nutrition recommendations. For many years we believed that fat adults could not be healthy unless they lost weight. Newer research focusing on physical fitness has challenged that notion. There are a number of studies that show that fat people who are physically fit have reduced their chronic disease risk by staying physically active. Older studies looking at chronic disease risk in obese populations, rarely

examined how physical fitness mitigated those risks. Newer studies have shown that fitness is a critical factor in the health of both fat and thin people. Although there are few studies with overweight children, we know that improving their fitness improves their health and reduces the health risks associated with their being overweight.

"We believe that the best way to decrease overweight is to create environments that promote healthy lifestyles."

Think about the current environment - how has it changed since you were a child? Did you walk to school or did someone drive you? Were you allowed to play outside your home without being watched over by an adult? Did you have a VCR, VD player, or computer at home? How much time did you spend watching TV? Playing handheld computer games? Searching the world wide web? How often did your family eat at fast food restaurants? How many fast food restaurants were within short driving distance of your house? Did you have daily physical education in school? Was it fun or was it awful? Was it taught by a teacher whose specialty was physical education? Were there vending machines in your school so you could buy soda, candy, and chips anytime you felt hungry?

It is important to recognize that the environment we live in influences our eating and activity patterns. Over the past 20 to 30 years, there have been tremendous changes in this country, and many of them are fostering the increasing prevalence of pediatric overweight. If we wish to reverse this trend, we are going to have to make changes in the environment that foster healthy lifestyles.

It is a myth that it is only fat kids who have unhealthy lifestyles, the truth of the matter is that the vast majority of children today - fat, thin, and in-between - have unhealthy lifestyles. The difference is that the fat kids are more genetically vulnerable to weight gain in the current environment.

"We recognize each child as a unique individual, and each family as a unique group of individuals."

I have made a number of generalizations about large children and their families. Needless to say, all of these things are not true about every family or every family member. It is important not to stereotype large children or their parents. At the same time, it is important to believe that...

"...the vast majority of parents love their children and are committed to fostering their health and welfare."

The parents of fat children are often held responsible for the way their child's body has turned out. This is very unfair. No one can mold or alter the size and shape of another human being. What parents are responsible for is modeling and promoting healthy lifestyles in their children. Making parents feel guilty about the fact that their child is fat is not empowering. Empowerment is having friends and

relatives who believe that you do love your child and are committed to fostering good health habits in that child.

"We know that our children are our future; we are strongly committed to caring for them and creating a world in which they can thrive."

We need to change the world. In an ideal world there would be:

- parks in every neighborhood that are safe places for children to play
- quality physical education provided daily in schools taught by a teacher who has expertise helping children enjoy movement
- nutrition education at every grade level in schools
- tasty, appetizing, and nutritious breakfasts and lunches available to all students in every school at no cost to parents.
- abolition of soft drink contracts and vending machines loaded with junk food in schools.
- baskets of fruit in classrooms for snacking
- after-school programs that improve academic achievement and offer opportunities for active play
- programs for new parents on how to establish good food habits in children right from the start