

Redefining the word 'diet' will lead to healthier eating habits

*By Laura Cipullo
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Since 2013, I have been on a mission to redefine the word "diet."
Well, actually, the mission is to get the public at large to use diet's original definition: "habitual nourishment."

Over time, the word "diet" has been filed in the "bad words" category even by me. Instead of using the word diet, I ask my clients about their daily intake.

As an RD, a registered dietitian, specializing in the non-diet approach or working with an intuitive eating philosophy, it would seem counterintuitive to use this word.

In my professional experience, when most women, men and even children hear the word "diet," they automatically associate it with deprivation, weight loss and extreme changes in food intake to produce weight loss.

The problem is what follows this, the diet mentality? Or should I say, the deprivation mentality?

Most people have come to know diet as a short-term fix pre-holiday or vacation. Even the Victoria Secret models share their runway diets with readers in the magazines.

But with the help of women including Linda Bacon and Ellyn Satter, the new focus of health is shifting to behaviors, not size. This doesn't mean that weight loss is not allowed, but the overall goal is size acceptance, eating all food, and practicing healthier habits.

But like I said, three years ago I looked up Webster's definition of "diet." And there it was in plain black and white: "habitual nourishment."

Music to my ears.

In an effort to get people to stop sabotaging their food choices, their weight and their health, a bunch of us declared war on diets. But I think we were wrong. As dietitians and healthcare practitioners, it is truly our job to neutralize this word just as one must do when overcoming overeating, recovering from an eating disorder, or, in general, moving from a disordered eating practice to a balanced eating practice.

If cake becomes a neutral food, meaning one without a value judgement, so should the word "diet."

With this in mind, I ask readers to commit to neutralizing the word "diet," the word "fat," and even the concept of weight loss or gain.

We all need to get comfortable using these words and removing the negative connotations from them.

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