

# A Guide for making healthier choices

## SECONDARY STRATEGY # 3 – DIETS DON'T WORK

**Important warning: Weight loss programs and diets are not appropriate for people 18 years of age and younger.**

**PROFILE # 1:** Melissa

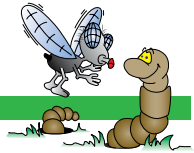
- 14 years old
- Grade 9.
- Likes: Clothes, shoes, movies, electronic and hip-hop music, videos, boys (cute ones only), fashion magazines, celebrity photos and parties.
- Dislikes: Country music, busy signals, bad weather, and rude boys.
- Favorite way to spend an hour: It's a toss-up between talking on the phone, reading gossip magazines or looking at magazines where she can get ideas for cool new clothes.
- Favorite Outfit: Tight denim wide-legs (although she'd rather wear her baggy pants when she's feeling fat), with purple crop-top tee and platform boots.
- Friends: Lots - but no one she considers a "best friend." She dates a little here and there.
- Favorite Food: Vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce, pizza, Caesar salad, and coffee.

**What does she eat?** Salad, diet soda, cottage cheese, an apple here and there – but this is because she's on a diet. Otherwise, she'd just eat the stuff she likes. She might have the occasional candy bar.

**Why does she eat this way?** She's eating this way because she wants to lose some weight - just 10 pounds - she says she'll be a lot happier when she does. She's not eating a whole lot: no breakfast (she says no time) and not much for lunch (she usually just tosses the sandwich her Mom makes). She claims she's not really hungry at dinner. She's just trying to look like this model she saw in the photos for these new jeans she just bought at the mall. She's also dieting partly because of her friends. She feels a certain amount of pressure to be thin. Besides, it seems like most of her friends are trying to do the same thing.

**What's wrong with this picture?** The diet Melissa has put herself on is dangerous. She's not eating enough food to make sure that her body will grow and develop normally. Melissa's dieting is causing her some serious problems. Besides the fact that she's always hungry (she just tries not to pay attention to it), she's also irritable and grumpy a lot. This is because she's just not eating enough and it's affecting the way she thinks and acts. She almost always seems to have a cold or the flu because she's just not eating enough to help her body fight off infections. She also complains about feeling tired, weak and having almost no energy. Melissa's dieting means that she's not eating certain foods like meat, milk and other basic foods so, her body is just not getting enough carbohydrates, protein, fat, iron, calcium as well as several other vitamins and minerals. She's eating in a way that is lacking in most of the essential nutrients that her body needs to be healthy.

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## PROFILE # 2: Denise

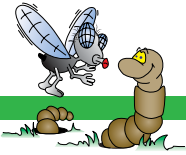
- 15 years old
- Grade 10.
- Likes: Clothes, movies, books, comedy shows on TV, boys (however, she's sometimes too afraid to talk to them), the Internet, parties and dancing (though not in front of people she doesn't know).
- Dislikes: Girls who seem to look good without even trying, dogs, and sports on TV
- Favorite way to spend an hour: Reading, and surfing the net, and eating. She used to play soccer until about a year ago but then she just lost interest.
- Favorite Outfit: Warm-up pants and her designer pullover, because they're big and comfy. She's had to buy bigger clothes than her friends lately because she's gained weight.
- Friends: A few close ones at school.
- Favorite Food: Ketchup-flavored potato chips (she'll eat the whole bag if the book she's reading is really good), macaroni and cheese, licorice and marshmallow cookies.

**What does she eat?** She eats quite a lot of low-nutrition, empty-calorie snacks. She's not too crazy about breakfast unless it's cinnamon toast with sugar. She eats meals regularly but she always likes to have dessert and she'd rather skip the veggies.

**Why does she eat this way?** Denise eats when she's reading or doing something on the computer. Sometimes she feels like she needs to "hide" her snacks and food from her Mom. Her Mom is trying to get her to lose weight by going on a diet. But she can't stay on it, mostly because she can't stand the food! She'd start playing soccer again but she feels like she's really out of shape. She's also embarrassed about her weight gain.

### What's wrong with this picture?

- She's not very physically active. She has become more and more self-conscious about her weight.
- She's bored and lonely a lot of the time, which makes her more likely to eat when she feels this way.
- She knows she's supposed to be on this diet but she can't stick to it. She feels like her mother is pressuring her anyway. She tells her Mom that she's following the diet, but then she's also hiding snacks in her room so that her Mom doesn't find out.
- Another reason for her weight gain has to do with Denise's genetics. You see, Denise's Mom has always struggled with her weight - she's always seemed kind of "big" for her actual body size. Denise's body size is directly related to how her parents' body shape seems to be.



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## PROFILE # 3: Justin

- 14 years old
- Grade 9
- Likes: Alternative music, the Internet, snowboarding, and playing hockey. He would really like to get into weight training but he isn't really sure how to do it; although he's started buying some fitness and weightlifting magazines to get some ideas and tips.
- Dislikes: Figure skating on TV, dance music, talk radio, and he thinks his arms and legs are too skinny.
- Favorite Way to Spend an Hour: It's a tie between playing hockey or surfing the web for all the cool sites to do with hockey so that he can update the stats on his favorite players.
- Favorite Outfit: What are you, nuts? He's a guy! He doesn't have a "favorite outfit," although he thinks his new hockey jacket is pretty cool.
- Friends: A few good buddies that he hangs with at school. Also, the guys on his hockey team.
- Favorite Food: It's a toss-up between pizza and French fries (with cheese, of course) - although nachos are pretty good too. He doesn't like most vegetables and some of the stuff his parents try to get him to eat.

**What does he eat?** Just about anything and everything (except vegetables) - but even still he can't seem to gain weight and this is really starting to bug him. He feels kind of scrawny compared to some of the other guys at school and on his hockey team.

**Why does he eat this way?** He thinks he's too skinny, although he would never tell anybody. He would like to be a little more muscular. Justin is just about eating his parents out of house and home. His Dad jokes that Justin is on a "see-food" diet, - if he "sees" food, he eats it! But no matter how much he eats, he never seems to gain weight. He wants to get into weight training but he's afraid he'd not be able to lift very much and the other guys would just laugh at him. His hockey coach said it would be better if he could gain some weight and put on a little more muscle. Justin knows that if he is eating a lot, he should be gaining some weight. But it's not really happening and it's starting to get him a little frustrated.

He's thinking of buying some of those weight gain powders that are advertised in the backs of the weightlifting magazines he looks at.

### What's wrong with this picture?

Justin is feeling some pressure to gain weight because he's afraid that if he doesn't, the hockey coach won't play him as much and he won't advance much further in his playing.

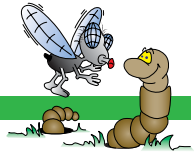
Justin is concerned about the way he looks. He feels kind of scrawny or skinny compared to other guys his age. He's also been looking at a lot of fitness and weight training magazines, which show lots of photos of guys with lots of muscle and these "great" bodies. They all seem to have really low body fat. And they also seem to be good-looking with nice tans and everything. They just seem to have this kind of "powerful" look that Justin wishes he could have too. He compares his body to others, instead of accepting his body as it is.

### So, if diets don't work, what should Melissa do?

#### *Examine what's realistic for her.*

- The magazine photos give Melissa a very unrealistic idea of what her body "should" look like. She needs to remember that the photos of those models are often not "real." The models have been made up to look glamorous and make-up and lighting have been used to achieve a certain look. Photos may have been retouched, airbrushed or manipulated by a computer to produce a "perfect" image.

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- She needs to surround herself with people and friends who will accept her for the way she really is. She needs to spend less time with people who could be having a negative influence on her. Everyone is an individual with his or her own body shape, size and appearance.

## *She needs to change how she eats.*

- When you look at what she is eating, you see that she is neglecting to give her body all of the essential nutrients it needs to grow, develop and be healthy.
- She needs to eat a variety of foods from all of the basic food groups.
- She needs to be able to eat normally which means being able to enjoy all kinds of foods without feeling "guilty" or "bad".

## **So, if diets don't work, what should Denise do?**

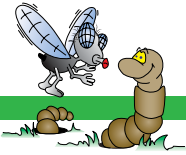
- Both Denise and her Mom have to accept they will never have "thin" bodies. They have to decide what is realistic for them as far as their body size, shape and weight goes. Both of them have to work at changing their attitudes towards their body image.
- Denise should also let her Mom know that she is feeling stressed by her Mom's efforts to put her on a diet. Of course, her Mom needs to stop applying that pressure as well. She needs to let Denise's body grow and develop to the size and shape that is right for her daughter.
- Denise needs to eat in a healthy, well-balanced way.
- She also needs to be physically active again – maybe not by playing soccer, but in some other way that she won't feel embarrassed or self-conscious.

## **So, if diets don't work, what should Justin do?**

- Although there isn't anything wrong with him becoming more interested in weight training and fitness, it isn't right that he feels like he should try to live up to a certain body image. He needs to accept the fact that his body is growing at a different rate than some other guys his age, and that his overall body type is different, too. At Justin's age, his body is entering into a period of significant growth and development - his muscles and frame will naturally start to grow and get stronger over the next few years. It is quite likely that Justin will "fill out" and lose his scrawny appearance during this time, simply as part of his body's normal and natural growth and development. In the meantime, he needs to be careful about how he does any weight training. He could very easily cause serious injury to himself if he starts to lift weights in the wrong way. He needs to get professional help to get started safely in the right way for him.
- He shouldn't feel pressured into trying to change because his hockey coach, or anyone else for that matter, thinks it's a good idea.
- Of course, he should continue to play hockey and be physically active in ways that he finds fun. This is important for his overall fitness, health and wellness.

Besides these things, Justin can also examine the way he is eating to make sure that he is providing his body with a variety of healthy foods. He needs to make healthier choices so he can keep up his energy levels and help his body recover better after his hockey games and other activities. Right now, he seems to be eating a lot of empty calorie "junk" in place of having a foundation of healthy foods. By eating more healthy food, from a variety of sources- lean meat, fruits and vegetables, nuts, whole grains, milk and calcium rich foods- he will be giving his body a better chance to grow, develop and become stronger.

Overall, a diet is not a long-term, healthy solution to maintaining or achieving a healthy body weight that is right for you. All three kids profiled need to re-think how they feel about themselves, their body image and their attitudes about eating and food. They need to decide what's realistic and healthy for them. They need to pay less attention to the examples set by fashion models, celebrities, friends or parents. They should also learn how to eat healthier and be physically active.



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Although your own situation may not be the same as any of these young people, the final message of this Secondary Strategy is the same:

- Diets don't work.
- Look and feel good on your own terms. Be realistic about what's right for you. Don't be influenced by the "perfect" images you might see in photos or pictures.
- Be physically active everyday.
- Eat sensibly; keep the principles of balance and moderation in mind. Make healthy choices.
- Look after your body.
- Choose health.

## Lunchbox # 1: Dieting and Losing Weight

Consider these points:

- 75% of women are unhappy with their appearance.
- 89% want to lose weight.
- 15% of women say they would give up more than 5 years of their life to be the ideal weight; 24% say they would give up more than 3 years of their life.
- Young girls are more afraid of becoming fat than they are of cancer, nuclear war or losing their parents.
- 50% of 9-year-old girls and 80% of 10-year-old girls have dieted.
- Girls are more prone to developing eating and self-image problems than developing drug or alcohol problems
- The "average" woman in North America is about 5-foot-5 inches tall and weighs about 140 pounds – yet, the "ideal" woman seen modeling in magazines and photo spreads is closer to 5-foot-9 or so and about 115 pounds. What's wrong with this picture?
- The large majority of people who are unhappy with their weight have also tried a variety of ways to lose those extra pounds. Most of these attempts to lose weight involve dieting, or the behavior of eating less food, or avoiding certain foods or groups of foods that are considered "fattening." Dieting to lose weight is very common – it is estimated that at any given time, about 25% of men and 40% of women are trying to follow some type of diet or weight loss program. People of all ages try to lose weight. Dieting has been reported in girls and boys as young as age 5-6.
- Most diets encourage people to try and follow a certain plan or regimen that may not necessarily be healthy or well-balanced. In fact, many diets are downright dangerous to your health. Hopefully, by this point in the book you will have realized the importance of the Foundation Strategies™ in helping you to eat food from all of the basic food groups in a balanced way. This can help to ensure that your body gets all of the nutrients it needs each day.

Clearly, when you look at these points, you can see that there is a real problem with how people see themselves and how this can contribute to their desire to lose weight and achieve a body shape/size that just isn't realistic for them.