

## The Skinny on Fat

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Once upon a time there was a beautiful island, where the women were happy, contented, and secure. They feasted upon the land's bounty, never worrying about the price of rice or the size of their thighs. One day, a strange and powerful force appeared upon the island in the form of an electronic box, which transmitted moving pictures and sound from lands far, far away.

Soon, the women became unhappy and dissatisfied. They spent countless hours in front of their mirrors, complaining about how big their bottoms were and how the upper parts of their arms jiggled. They became obsessed with their bodies, nothing satisfied them, and they couldn't relax and be content with themselves. They lived unhappily ever after.

A fairy tale? Unfortunately not. This small and tragic story is based upon an actual study that was done in Fiji by researchers at the Harvard

University Medical School. When television arrived on the island in 1995, an alarming increase in anorexia and bulimia was found within the female population, especially among teenaged girls. The percentage of dieting among women also rose dramatically. And, it is important to note that before the introduction of TV, the ideal female body image in Fiji had been relatively heavy - when compared to standards in the United States.

Of course, it's never a good thing to be vastly overweight. But in many instances, especially in Western culture, women are overly - and misguidedly - concerned with their body image, to the point where it has become a miserable passion to lose that extra ten pounds. Even particularly skinny women might be heard complaining more than a few times, "I'm SOOOOO faaaat!" while they try like the dickens to pinch an ounce of fat to demonstrate their hideous corpulence.

Where do these standards come from? From supermodels, whose body types represent around 5% of most of the female population? Television and movies, where actors are hired based a good deal on appearance - weight included? The media has, unfortunately, dealt women a low blow when it comes to representing healthy, realistic body images. And women suffer in many ways for this.



But why should it be a surprise? This is a paradoxical culture, which scarfs down fast food like there's no tomorrow, and then undergoes surgery that suctions the fat off the derriere and puts it on the face to make itself look younger. (Truth really *is* stranger than fiction).

Before you even think about wearing your hiney

on your face, try to think of some other ways of making yourself full of health and vibrant as a sunbeam. Here are some helpful hints that will not only make you stronger and more energetic, but can make you feel better about your body image:

1. **Turn off the boob tube!** Besides the Harvard Medical School study, which found an alarming increase in anorexia and bulimia within the female population due to the introduction of television, other studies on this matter have shown that television and obesity go hand in hand. The bottom line is it doesn't help for you to be constantly bombarded with images of undernourished and overpaid actresses and models, looking successful and happy. Remember that television isn't real and doesn't realistically depict the lives of most people. Your success and happiness are based on factors that exist on a much deeper level than how slender you look.
2. **Take a walk around the block.** You don't have to go to the gym five days a week to get the exercise you need. If you take brisk walks for about a half an hour a day, you'll feel better and be healthier. Walking has also been known to help lessen anxiety and depression, so lace up your sneaks and head on out!
3. **Eat a balanced diet.** It sounds so obvious, but it's really true. Amazing how many people hear this advice all the time, yet ignore it and opt for all kinds of fad diets that take off the weight quickly, only to be disappointed when they gain it all back a couple of months later. Dieting doesn't work. Really and truly. You're only setting yourself up for feeling like a failure if you diet.

Instead of dieting, try to eat foods that are full of nutrients and protein, and lay off the fast food, processed food, and fried food. Eat a handful of nuts, or crunch a crisp salad loaded with all kinds of extras added – sliced chicken or turkey, chick peas, hard boiled eggs, sesame seeds, artichoke hearts, dried cranberries – all of these ingredients will liven up a salad, and keep you full for a long time. It's not

dieting – it's changing the way you eat. There's a big difference.

4. **Have dinner with friends.** Keeping up with a strong social life helps you feel supported and loved. Eating with friends helps you to get into a routine of prolonged eating habits, and the slower you eat, the less you eat. Invite some of your favorite people over for dinner and chat the night away at the dinner table.
5. **Drink water.** And lots of it. At least eight glasses a day (that's right –eight)! Not only will it help you maintain your weight, it will also give your skin a lovely texture and glow.
6. **Garden, ride a bike, play with your kids.** In other words, stay active. You don't necessarily have to do ten billion sit-ups to keep in shape. Just living your life can help you become or remain your sleek self.

Do yourselves a big favor - try not to get caught up in someone else's idea of how many inches your waistline should be. If you feel good, and have the thumbs up from your doctor, relax and let your life happen. You should know that you have such divine beauty – let yourself shine.



**Beauty from the inside out**

Sustain your inner beauty by donating to a charity that helps the hungry. Some good choices are UNICEF ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)), The Heifer Project ([www.heiferproject.org](http://www.heiferproject.org)), and Care ([www.care.org](http://www.care.org)). Or help those who are hungry by volunteering your time at a local shelter.

*Sources: Garner, D.M. (1997). Psychoeducational principles in the treatment of eating disorders. In: Handbook for Treatment of Eating Disorders. (145-177). D.M. Garner & P.E. Garfinkel (Eds). New York, NY: Guilford Press.*

*BBC Online Network, Thursday, May 20, "TV Brings Eating Disorders to Fiji"; Published 1999 at 13:13 GMT 14:13 UK*

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