



Women's Health Victoria

healthy empowered equal

**Gender, food and physical activity:
risks in health promotion messages**

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Gender and the promotion of healthy diet and physical activity

- Gender inequality
- Traditional gender norms
- Women's mental health



Women are inactive

- 72.4% women were insufficiently active in the preceding week

People aged 15-17 years	Undertake high levels of exercise	Sedentary
Males	31.2%	14.5%
Female	11.8%	28.7%

2011-2012 Australian Health Survey

- Recent Victorian Health Monitor found 33.9% of women do not meet guidelines



Women are not eating well

- Most women don't eat according to the Australian Dietary Guidelines



Prejudice and discrimination

‘Fat hatred and thin worship are so ingrained and constant in our culture that most people are not even aware of these beliefs as choices.’

Marilyn Wann



Food, exercise and women's mental health

- Inadequate diet and physical activity are associated with depression
- Dieting is a risk factor for eating disorders
- Fear for personal safety



Objectification, body size and women's mental health

- Women harmed through objectification of their bodies
- Self-objectification – linked to poor motor performance, eating disorders, depression and non-participation in physical activity
- More satisfaction when bodies viewed through a functional not aesthetic lens



Gender inequality and food insecurity

- Women experience more food insecurity than men
- Obesity + food insecurity = risk of weight gain
- Food insecurity associated with anxiety and depression



Gender inequality

- Lack of time due to caring responsibilities
- Inequitable access to sporting and recreational facilities



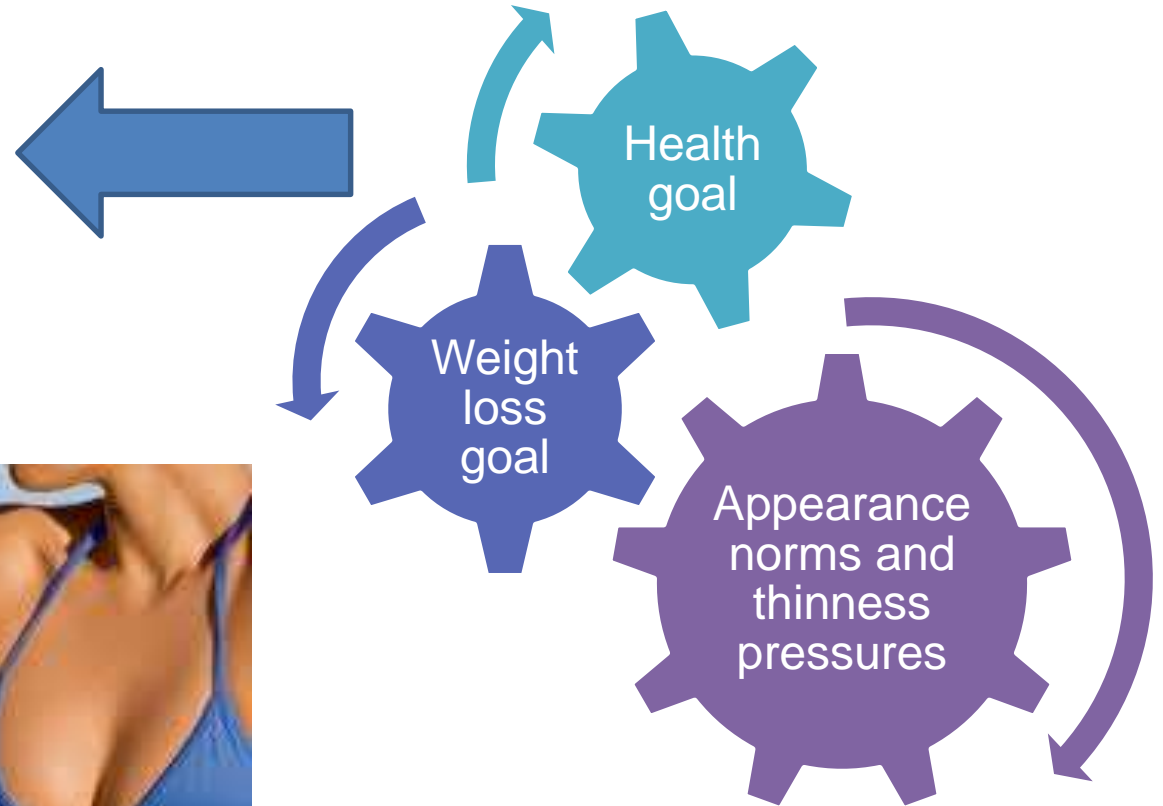
Fighting fat hasn't made the fat go away - public health challenges

- Refrain from blaming the individual
- Refrain from stigmatizing women who are overweight or obese
- Maintain and strengthen work to influence the environment and food supply



Risks of unintended harm

Self-objectification
Poor body image
Decreased exercise



Challenges to the evidence

- Obesity 'epidemic' disputed
- Unhealthiness of 'fat' disputed
- BMI as an accurate measure disputed
- Bullying and discrimination is more damaging than obesity



Health At Every Size



Fat acceptance or liberation

It
Took
a Lot
of
Will
Power,



But
I Finally
Gave
Up
Dieting.



Weight loss versus body acceptance



Apply a **gender** lens



Health promotion messages

- Move away from a focus on body size
- Promote physical activity and healthy eating as self-nurturing and enjoyable
- Consider women's mental health

GOAL – health not weight loss



Challenge social norms

- Men as carers
- Women as sportspeople
- 'Healthy' ≠ 'thin'



Create conducive environments

- Advocate for improved transport and alternative fresh food supplies
- Group programs increase physical activity and provide benefits of social support
- Consider the role of family in mutually reinforcing health behaviours
- Address discrimination and violence-supportive attitudes



Summary

- Promote physical activity and healthy eating as self-nurturing and enjoyable
- Challenge the environment
- Create ways to make that a reality

