

naafaTM



Guidelines for **fitness professionals**
who serve fat clients



GUIDELINES FOR FITNESS PROFESSIONALS WHO SERVE FAT CLIENTS

We appreciate that you are taking the time to learn about weight neutral fitness programming. NAAFA supports the premise that exercise is good for everybody; that physical activity is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, we believe people of every size should be free to engage in physical activities free of judgment, bias and harassment. We view the word fat, as simply a descriptor and not a judgment about a person's character, intellect or ability. To learn more about weight bias and size discrimination, go to NAAFA's website at www.naafa.org. As a fitness professional, you can assist your clients with engaging in physical activities free of these barriers. Here are some guidelines to help you work successfully with all your clients using a health centered approach.



CONSIDER THIS:

If changing the size or shape of one's body was NOT the point of exercise, what would you offer as benefits of exercise? The following are just a few benefits that are independent of weight loss or body shaping. Sound familiar? We encourage you to focus on these benefits:

- Better sleep
- More flexibility
- Increased stamina
- More range of motion
- Boosts immune system
- Increased overall energy

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX:

Get curious about your client. Ask them what they are looking for and what is important to them. Listen closely and consider how you can help. Ask your client's fitness level, not everyone is a beginner. A variety of studies indicate that 90-95% of all people who lose weight regain it within 2-5 years. Perhaps weight loss is a goal that needs to be discarded. Getting to the gym 3 times a week is not a goal, it's a process. Some examples of goals that support clients in being physically fit and healthy are:

- Participate in a 5k to raise funds for a non-profit organization
- Taking a vacation and navigating airports with ease
- Attending a favorite outdoor festival
- Playing with a child
- Participating in a dance class
- Attending a dog training class with your pet

Imagine how you will support a client with one of these goals. Consider how different those conversations might be. Look beyond your client's physical attributes, and focus on a more holistic approach. Help them reach an internally motivated goal rather than an externally motivated goal.

HEALTH HISTORY:

If weight loss and body shaping are not the point of an exercise program, what information do you need to collect before you begin with a new client? You still need all their relevant health history such as age, medical conditions, joint problems, prescriptions, etc. Include the type of work they do, pets they own, household members, activities they enjoy or have enjoyed in the past, activities they have not enjoyed and would not want to try again. Think of ideas that would help you make the experience of exercise enjoyable and sustainable. Ask your client if they can get up and down from the floor.

FITNESS TESTING:

DON'T DO IT! You don't need weight, body fat composition, tape measures or standard strength/flexibility testing. Typical fitness testing is a tool to measure progress, however look for other methods. Ask your client what they are noticing as they progress. You will start to see all the benefits of exercise showing up for your client. If they were interested in a specific type of movement, an increase in the movement they can comfortably do might be a way to enjoy a meaningful result. They may report participation is easier or that they can easily lift items. All of these are indications of increased fitness.

GROUP FITNESS:

Teach to the person in the room who needs you the most; don't make the class competitive or about getting your own workout. Make sure you have ways for the large exerciser or beginner to modify. Have sturdy chairs available for people who cannot get on the floor or need to rest. Always offer a low impact and/or an easier variation of what you are teaching. We know you have a lot of knowledge that you can use. Be very aware of how you use words. Do not promote spot reducing or working off a 'bad' meal. These behaviors can contribute to disordered eating and body image issues, as well as be insulting to your fat clients.

A BETTER WAY TO SAY IT:

One of our tools as teachers and coaches is using our words to support people. Choose words that are kind, compassionate and create ease. For example, instead of "exercise compliance", call it "sustainable and pleasant exercise programming". Instead of "overweight or obese" say "large or fat". Instead of "have to" try "you may want to". Catch yourself before making a comment about body size or shape and always choose a weight neutral comment.

FOOD AND FITNESS:

Make sure your client is properly fueled and hydrated for a workout so they do not pass out during your hour. Other than that, do not bring food into the conversation. Make their time with you be just about finding pleasurable and sustainable ways to exercise. Avoid "good food-bad food" conversations. If questions about food come up, encourage them to seek out a weight neutral, health centered nutritionist. Resources at the end of this guide may assist them.



PROGRAM DESIGN TIPS:

First and foremost, always err on the side of caution and dignity. Remember to remove posters and items promoting negative messages from the exercising environment.

- A fat person's knees, feet and hips may be particularly stressed, so choose high benefit-low risk lower body exercises. Never do weighted leg extensions unless prescribed by a physical therapist or health care provider, always use closed chain exercises.
- Standing up and sitting down, if possible, is a great leg strengthening option.
- Calf and hamstring stretches are important to prevent foot problems.
- Pelvic tilts can be the best abdominal exercise for a fat person.
- Crunches are often counter-productive because they create as much forward posture as they do abdominal strength.
- Choose machines or dumbbells over stretch bands for basic strengthening exercises whenever possible. Stretch bands often create extra tension in the neck and upper back, which is not useful.
- Typically, the weight of the person's body will be enough resistance to start. Proceed with care and notice what is too hard, too easy or not appropriate.

Use your good judgment; if the person is a beginner, design a beginning program. Be a really good guide for your client; pay close attention to what they say and what they don't say. You can tell if the exercise you choose is wrong for that person. If someone says "that hurts" or "I don't want to try that", stop and do something else. There are lots of exercise options and variations, be creative and always curious about your client's experience.

USE OF EQUIPMENT:

Make sure the equipment you use is safe for someone of your client's size. Keen practical awareness is what you need to make appropriate equipment choices.

- Sturdy benches that are bolted down are good.
- Sturdy wooden boxes found in some gyms work well.
- Exam tables that you might find in a physical therapist office are a great tool if people cannot get on the floor. Folding massage tables are not sturdy enough.
- Look at the size of the seat, consider if your client will fit on it comfortably and safely. Sometimes sitting on a ball is a good idea, sometimes not.
- Know the recommended weight limits on all equipment. Ask yourself if the equipment rated will accommodate your client's size. Look at the height, to determine if it is manageable to access.
- There are many types of leg presses, most are hard to get in and out of. Think ahead about how your client will be able to manage certain equipment.



STAND OUT:

Try incorporating these techniques for people of all sizes and you will stand out from the rest of the fitness crowd as a weight neutral, health-centered professional. Your colleagues will wonder how you've increased your clientele and why your clients are happy and healthy.

We Come in All Sizes...

RESOURCES

ARTICLES:

Bacon, L. & Aphramor L.

Weight Science: Evaluating the Evidence for a Paradigm Shift

Nutrition Journal, 2011, 10(9)

<http://www.nutritionj.com/content/10/1/9>

Campos, P**, Saguy A., Ernsberger, P**, Oliver, E., Gaesser, G.
The epidemiology of overweight and obesity: public health crisis or moral panic?

IJE, 2006 35 (1)

<http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/content/35/1/55.full>

Robison, J.**

10 Things You Can Do Right Now

(You can download and give to your clients)

[https://www.wellcocorp.com/pdf/](https://www.wellcocorp.com/pdf/reports/10_things_robison_wellco.pdf)

[reports/10_things_robison_wellco.pdf](https://www.wellcocorp.com/pdf/reports/10_things_robison_wellco.pdf)

BOOKS:

Don't Weight, Eat Healthy & Get Moving NOW

by: Kelly Bliss, M.Ed., A.C.E.

Health at Every Size, The Surprising Truth About Your Weight

by: Dr. Linda Bacon, Ph.D

Big Fat Lies: The Truth about Your Weight and Your Health

by: Glenn A. Gaesser, Ph.D

The Fat Chick Works Out

by: Jeanette DePatie, M.A., ACE

The Fat Studies Reader,

edited by: Dr. Esther Rothblum, Ph.D** & Sondra Solovay, J.D.**

Great Shape: The First Fitness Guide for Large Women

by: Pat Lyons, M.A., R.N.** & Debby Burgard, Ph.D**

Mega Yoga

by: Megan Garcia

WEBSITES:

Anna Guest-Jelley, Founder, Curvy Yoga

<http://www.curvyyoga.com/>

Cinder Ernst, Certified Medical Exercise Specialist & Life Coach

<http://cinderernst.com/>

Jeanette DePatie, M.A., A.C.E.

<http://www.thefatchick.com>

Kelly Bliss, M. Ed, A.C.E., Plus Size Fitness Professional & Lifestyle Coach

<http://www.kellybliss.com/>

Linda Bacon, Ph.D, Professor, Researcher & Author

<https://lindobacon.com/>

Health At Every Size® (HAES) Webpage

<https://www.sizediversityandhealth.org/>

Sally Pugh, Yoga for the Large Woman

<http://www.gratefulspirityoga.net/index.html>

BROCHURE CONTRIBUTORS & EDITORS:

Cinder Ernst**

Lisa M. Tealer*

Peggy Howell*

Member, NAAFA's Board of Directors*

NAAFA Newsletter Fitness Contributor**

DESIGN AND LAYOUT:

Darliene Howell*

This brochure is provided for educational purposes only. NAAFA is not responsible or liable for any action or outcomes resulting from the content provided in this brochure. NAAFA is not responsible for the content or accuracy of information provided by other websites, journals, articles and books. Some of the resources listed may not reflect NAAFA's policies. Distribution of this brochure is permissible. Use of specific sections requires permission from NAAFA.

Health At Every Size® is a registered trademark of ASDAH.