

Stop Body Shaming During the Outbreak

A pandemic is not a reason to be unkind to your body or the bodies of others.

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Source: Eric Antunes/Pexels

With people around the world hunkering down at home in hopes of [flattening the curve](#) of this pandemic, COVID-themed [memes](#) and jokes have been proliferating. From hilarious threads about what one's [co-workers](#) (i.e., kids and [pets](#)) are doing to [virus-themed songs](#), it's clear we are all looking for a smile during this time of [stress](#).

But in addition to home-schooling fails and jokes about wearing sweatpants 24-hours a day, we're also seeing a barrage of memes focused on weight gain and binge eating. Memes referencing "the [Covid-19](#)" as a variant of the "the Freshman 15" are making the rounds, as are memes suggesting that those with anorexia have been "training for this moment" of food scarcity. Social media comments about bingeing on comfort food seem to pop up roughly as often as guidance on how to wash one's hands appropriately.

Here are three very good reasons to think carefully before you post about weight and [body image](#)-related topics.

First, let's talk about fat-shaming. When you make comments suggesting that gaining weight is one of the worst things that could happen to you during this outbreak, you're sending a clear message to everyone whose body is bigger than yours – and it's not a nice message. You're using the bodies of people heavier than you as a punchline.

People of all body shapes and sizes are suffering right now. Researchers have generated piles of [evidence](#) that weight-related shaming and teasing is linked with increased negative health outcomes. Although you may not realize it, when you speak negatively about your own body size or about gaining weight, you may be shaming others who see your posts. If you post about how awful it would be if you gained 20 pounds during a quarantine, what might that communicate to the person who weighs 20 pounds (or more) more than you do?

(Side note: If you want to argue that people who gain weight should be shamed because it promotes healthy habits, rest assured that you're wrong. People who experience weight-related stigma are more likely to [gain weight](#) over time, less likely to [stick with exercise](#), and more likely to engage in [dangerous weight control strategies](#). Body [shame](#) [does not](#) promote weight loss.)

Here's a second reason to think twice before posting weight and eating-related jokes and memes. Many who struggle with [eating disorder](#) symptoms are having an especially hard time right now. [Food scarcity](#) (whether actual or imagined) can trigger eating disordered thoughts and behaviors. Extreme [stress](#) can also provoke binge eating.



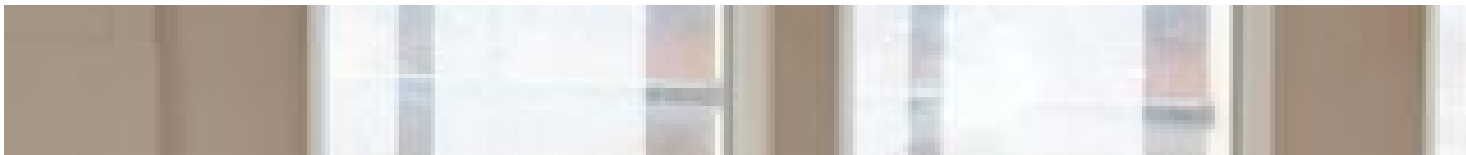
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Those living with [bulimia](#) or [binge eating disorder](#) may be having a very difficult time managing their symptoms right now. Memes and posts that treat bingeing like a joke do a disservice to those who might be struggling to manage serious eating disordered behavior.

Finally, please remember that disparaging comments about your own body can hurt you – even if it feels like you’re just poking fun at yourself. Engaging in negative body talk tends to make people [feel worse](#) about their own bodies. If you’re struggling with body image concerns during this difficult time, try some positive distraction instead of disparaging your body. Take a moment to write an encouraging text or email to someone you care about. Look at a picture of a cute animal. Research how you can support vulnerable members of your community and find one way to help.

Remember that times of stress can re-open old psychological wounds – both yours and others’. Be gentle with the people around you, the people on your social media feed, and yourself. Instead of focusing on weight gain, take this opportunity to show [compassion to your body](#). In doing so, you may also find it easier to show compassion to others. Remember that many therapists are offering online sessions during this period. If you need help, [please seek it out](#). A virtual [therapy](#) session is absolutely better than no session at all.







Source: bongkarn thanyakij/Pexels

Using social media to connect with others can be a lifeline in times like these. But as you make those connections, try not to make them at the expense of your own body or the bodies of others. You are more than the shape of your body and so are the people around you. Use your social media feeds to spread hope, cheer, or useful information instead of body shaming.