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# SHAPE

## Can You Tell Someone You Love They Need to Lose Weight?

Experts weigh in on how to broach the topic without hurting your relationship.

Jené Luciani



"I'd ask *him* how much he weighs, and then I'd shed *him!*" exclaims Aileen Zsenyuk, a woman who recently [lost 115-pounds](#) [1]. While her partner wasn't the catalyst for her weight loss, for some women, it's one of the worst things you could ever imagine coming out of a loved one's mouth: the words "you're fat."

Hurtful, maybe, but in some cases, absolutely necessary for the person's own health and well-being. In cases where one is morbidly obese, it could even save their life. But for some people, excess weight serves as a shield, one that they aren't quite ready to shed. According to certified health coach Holly Stokes, "Weight can be a way of hiding who we really are from others so they don't reject us or get too close, and often, it's a way of insulating yourself from a partner's criticism."

So instead of coming off as critical, try a more positive approach. Caryl Ehrlich, a weight-loss coach who helps people [beat food addiction](#) [2] says that if you decide to tell someone they need to diet, there are tactful ways to take this step. "Instead of outwardly saying 'you need to lose weight,' you could say 'I love you just the way you are and I want you around for a long time for me and the kids, so you might want to eat in a healthier way.'

If you don't go about it the right way, Ehrlich says, it could have severe repercussions. "The recipient would be mortified that someone noticed they were overweight and the relationship would never ever be the same. That's when people go into the closet and become secret eaters," she says.

Actions speak louder than words, says Judy Lederman, author of *Joining the Thin Club: Tips for Toning Your Mind AFTER You've Trimmed Your Body* (Three Rivers Press, 2007). "Unless you want to cause animosity, do NOT tell them with words," Lederman says. "Instead, show the person you are concerned by taking them for nice, long walks, making them [healthy meals](#) [3], keeping junk food out of the house, and keeping healthy fruits and veggies readily available. You can also sign them up for a gym membership as a gift and do whatever it takes to get them into the gym, such as purchasing personal training sessions or massages."

Now, what if you're the one on the receiving end of the news? Sharon O'Neill, a New York based marriage and family therapist and author of *A Short Guide to a Happy Marriage* (Cider Mill Press, 2009), says to carefully consider what your loved one is trying to tell you instead of just dismissing it as criticism. "First, ask yourself how this request was delivered. If it was delivered with love and concern, I'd advise thinking twice about it. However, if it was delivered with anger and disgust, there could be a deeper issue going on."

Sometimes, the person who's demanding the weight loss could be projecting their own insecurities onto you. "If this is more of a case of dissatisfaction with one's self, then I'd pass on accepting the advice," says Debbie Mandel, author of *Addicted to Stress* (Wiley and Sons, 2008). Similarly, they could be asking for a lot more than just five or ten pounds. "If your partner is trying to change you completely, run the other way!" says body image coach Stephanie Mansour. "If you are losing weight to impress someone or for someone else's approval, it will never stick!" she adds.

Once you've looked inward and analyzed the intentions of your partner, taking a good look at the relationship itself could provide some insight, O'Neill says. "Ask yourself honestly, is my weight affecting the relationship or the intimacy within it? Does my partner have some unrealistic aspiration of the perfect body?" In some cases, women have reported their marriages unraveling because, as they aged or their bodies changed, their partners became angered. In the book *The Millennium Diet: the Practical Guide for Rapid Weight Loss* (Healthnets, 2010), several such cases are referenced. According to weight-loss coach Pat Barone, "Some partners tend to focus on the other's weight because they don't want to face what the *real* issues are."

For what it's worth, some experts say, don't take it so personally. "Often my clients will equate 'You need to lose weight' with 'You are fat and worthless.' This is simply not true," says Dr. Elizabeth Lombardo, a psychologist, physical therapist, and author.

If someone delivers you the news that [you need to shed a few pounds](#) [4] (or more) and you agree with them, after you've absorbed it, experts say, it's time to devise a plan. "After I've licked my wounds, I'd turn it into a case of personal empowerment," Mandel says. "Once you've decided you want to get fit and live a healthier lifestyle, set a sustainable meal plan and exercise program." And, for lack of a better term, remember that the person likely had good intentions—so don't shoot the messenger. "I appreciate the friend who tells me I have broccoli stuck in my front teeth," she adds.

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[0]; sctpt.parentNode.insertBefore(elem, sctpt); })( ); _qevents.push({ qacct:"p-4bp1NU6fZ5af6" });
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#### Links

- [1] <http://www.shape.com/weight-loss/success-stories/how-shape-reader-shyla-ray-lost-120-pounds>
- [2] <http://www.shape.com/latest-news-trends/do-you-have-addiction-food-5-food-addiction-symptoms>
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