Why Is Weight Such a Heavy Subject?

America's obesity problem is often described with the word "epidemic," and that is hardly an exaggeration. The [statistics](#) are staggering. Today, around one out of three American adults is obese, and one out of six children and adolescents are obese. Obesity related illnesses are a major cause of death.

Information about Americans' struggles with weight is easily found all over the internet. Media outlets often feature stories about it. However, there seems to be a disconnect when it comes to talking about this issue in real life. The topic is loaded — to put it mildly.

If a person says they are on a diet, it seems almost obligatory for those around them to start protesting that they don't need to lose weight. If that isn't possible because the dieter is obviously overweight, then the other people will invariably caution them to be careful and lose the weight slowly.

Their words of reassurance are not always sincere. A [study](#) found that women who make disparaging comments about their own weight or body are less liked by their peers.

I've experienced this firsthand. A few years ago after I had given birth, I casually mentioned to a group of friends that I was drinking green smoothies to lose my baby weight. To my amazement, they rounded on me. They told me it was unrealistic of me to try to "return to my pre-baby body" — even though I hadn't said anything like that. I was simply out to lose some of the extra weight I had gained.

Supermodel Gisele Bundchen briefly became one of the most [hated](#) women in America when she said in an [interview](#), "I think a lot of people get pregnant and decide they can turn into

garbage disposals. I was mindful about what I ate, and I gained only 30 pounds." Her wording was unfortunate. Did she really need to call pregnant women "garbage disposals?" But she was right in stressing the importance of healthy eating during pregnancy. However, that message got lost in the backlash.

The one place where you would expect to find honest, straightforward discussion about weight is between a doctor and their patient. But even here, the topic seems to be fraught with difficulty. A few years ago, a friend was fuming to me that her son's pediatrician had said he should lose 10 pounds. My friend thought this was insane. The conversation put me in a difficult position. Looking at my friend's son, I thought the pediatrician was probably right, but I had to be extremely tactful in how I expressed that.

It does not help that most of us have a social media echo chamber to tell us what we want to hear. Last week, a pregnant acquaintance posted about how upset she was that her OBGYN had told her off for gaining weight too quickly. She included a photo of herself looking svelte, with a small baby bump. Her post garnered hundreds of responses, with people encouraging her to find a new doctor or sharing their stories of the huge amounts of weight they gained during their own pregnancies.

It sounds like the OBGYN was tactless — but probably not wrong. It is important to watch how much you gain during pregnancy. I've had three babies now. The weight doesn't magically get expelled with the placenta. Losing it takes blood, sweat, and tears — and green smoothies.

Why is it so difficult to have direct conversations about weight? No doubt many of us are concerned about the prevalence of eating disorders. It's right to be sensitive and choose our words carefully. Also, we often don't know the full story. There may be medical reasons for a person's weight. However, given the extent of America's obesity problem, we should all

try to be more sincere about this topic. That would be a step in the right direction.

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