Backgrounder for “The Journey From Dieting to Healthy Eating”—
A Resource for Youth

What is the purpose of this resource?
“The Journey from Dieting to Healthy Eating” infographic was designed to promote the concept that healthy bodies come in different sizes and shapes. Diet culture is everywhere as we are constantly bombarded with messages that our bodies aren’t good enough. Parents, educators, and health professionals can use the infographic, backgrounder, and the additional resource list to support youth to reconsider dieting and explore shifting to a more positive relationship with food and their body.

Why focus on health, not weight?
One of the most common myths is that “you can lose weight if you try hard enough" (with the “right" diet). The bottom line is fad diets don’t work. Weight lost is often regained in the future, plus more. It’s mostly genetics that determines your body shape, weight, and how you will grow. Physical activity and diet will influence your body weight and shape, but there is a limit to how much you can change it. What matters is that we care for our bodies through eating well and being active—behaviours which benefit everyBODY. Instead of trying to change weight, practice self-compassion. Instead of a weight loss goal, set behavioural goals related to eating habits, sleep, relationships, or physical activity.

How does healthy eating differ from dieting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy Eating</th>
<th>Dieting</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adequate, meets nutritional needs</td>
<td>Restrictive, restrained eating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Balanced, inclusive, variety</td>
<td>Omits certain foods or food groupings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved quality</td>
<td>Limited quantity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom and flexibility</td>
<td>Rigid rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>“All foods can fit” into a healthy eating pattern</td>
<td>“Good food, bad food”</td>
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<td>Enjoyable, positive mood</td>
<td>Unsatisfying, negative mood</td>
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<td>Based on internal cues of hunger and satisfaction</td>
<td>Based on external controls (e.g. calorie counting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>Short term</td>
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Self-Reflection
"Diet" is not a bad word—it can refer to the foods you normally eat. In this infographic, "dieting" refers to efforts to try to lose weight or change your body shape beyond what is healthy or normal for your genetic body type.

The purpose of healthy eating and exercise is not solely to achieve a healthy weight. Rather, health is a resource for everyday life, enabling individuals to do activities important to them such as learning, working, playing sports, spending time with friends, and looking after others.

Questions to consider
- Where does healthy eating end and disordered eating begin?
- At what point does healthy eating become unhealthy?
- Do you think healthy eating is more about what you include in your diet, or what you exclude?

Resources to Build a Positive Relationship with Food
It can be hard to find reliable health information because the approach or language often supports diet culture. Invite youth to spot nutrition fads and find good sources for nutrition advice.

- The Joy of eating—Article about the foundation of healthy eating
- Intuitive Eating—Books about intuitive eating for adults and youth
- The Mindful Eating Workbook—Workbook to develop a mindful eating practice
- Foundry BC Healthy Living—Foundry BC’s healthy living tips for youth
- How to Raise Kids with a Healthy Body Image—Article with tips to foster positive body image

For teachers and educators
- Healthy Body Building Blocks—Kathy Kater’s 12 Body Image Health downloadable posters
- Promoting Positive Body Image—Teaching tools and resources to promote healthy body image

Additional Information
If you have questions on the topics of healthy eating, dieting, or disordered eating, please contact your local public health dietitian. If you have specific questions about a child’s nutrition, you can contact HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 to speak to a registered dietitian or email a HealthLinkBC dietitian.

Written by Vancouver Coastal Health Child and Youth Public Health Dietitians, March 2020