

A Healthy Approach to Weight Loss: An Interview with Dr. Lavinia Rodríguez

When you think about making changes to live a more healthy life, you may focus on weight loss, eating healthy, fitness and stress reduction. These are all a part of living healthy, however successful weight loss is a challenge for many and the reason is because of our thinking and our brain's resistance. In a recent interview with Dr. Lavinia Rodríguez, we discussed her new book *Mind Over Fat Matters: Conquering Psychological Barriers to Weight Management* and how it addresses the mainstream population. What I found even more interesting is that the book is also about life management and how the power of our brain can move us forward or keep us stuck on our journey. The book is full of great content and Dr. Rodríguez shared even more in this exclusive interview. – Donna Adinolfi



Dr. Lavinia Rodríguez

Q Did you have an 'Aha!' moment for writing *Mind Over Fat Matters* perhaps based on your own personal story or has 'the book' been evolving over a number of years?

I had many 'Aha' moments while working with my patients throughout the years. In particular, seeing what psychological deprivation could do to someone's eating behavior, noticing how our society through the years was looking more and more like my eating disordered patients due to the preoccupation with dieting and food, made me want to write a book for the general public that struggles with failing attempts at controlling their eating and weight.

Q In thinking about Chapter 1 (The Psychology of your Brain), would you share your thoughts/insight on this and perhaps a tip or two that our readers can implement today?

As humans, one of the things we have in common is our thinking brain. It tends to think in characteristic ways which we all share. It doesn't like rigidity, punishment, deprivation and feeling deprived. Do these sound like characteristics of the typical diet? It responds well to kindness, flexibility, praise and small steps toward a goal. Just like a child will have difficulty learning a task if he or she is constantly put down, criticized and punished, adults have difficulty staying on diet programs that are rigid, punishing, and overwhelming. That is why a long-term, lifestyle changing, and a gradual approach to fitness and weight loss works so much better than the typical rigid diets followed by most dieters today.

Regardless of what everyone else is doing, you are better off taking the following two steps:

- 1. Use weight loss approaches that you can easily follow for the rest of your life.*
- 2. Eliminate critical and punishing thinking about losing weight and instead use kindness and praise, focusing on the gradual, progressive behaviors of eating better and being more active instead of weight itself. The body will take care of the weight if you focus on just the behaviors.*

Q Thinking about the obesity epidemic in this country, especially with our children and the increased incidence of diabetes, what are three simple yet life changing tips you'd like to share with our readers that are perhaps different from what they may have heard before?

Three Tips from Dr. Rodriguez:

1. *Positive modeling is the most important thing a parent can do for their children to prevent or treat obesity in their children. Even if the parents are not overweight by living a life of healthy eating and activity, parents are giving the most powerful gift to their child.*

2. *Stay away from criticizing or focusing on the concrete (eating, exercise behaviors). Instead, focus on the abstract (building self-esteem, making healthy food and activity choices available, praising). Too many parents think they are doing their job by criticizing a child's eating and nagging them about exercise. This leads to the opposite of what the parent wants. The child will resist – wouldn't you?*

3. *If you're having difficulty helping your child with weight and eating issues (even if they don't have an eating disorder) don't be too proud to get professional help for yourself in order to learn how best to approach the problem. Too often parents don't seek help and, if they do, they think the child is the only problem so they send the child to the therapist to be "fixed."*

Q I enjoyed reviewing your tips for starting the journey towards weight loss and thought they'd be helpful to our readers. Please elaborate:

Four Tips for your Journey:

1. *Comfort is important when trying to make headway with weight loss. The more uncomfortable you are in your clothes, the more preoccupied you will be with your body. That is why wearing clothes that fit properly and are fun to wear is important.*
2. *Low self-esteem will get in the way of any goal, especially with weight loss. The brain will react consistent with our view of ourselves. If we don't think much of ourselves, why would we do anything that will make us better and happier? Instead, we will do what is consistent with our view of ourselves. In this case, that would be failing at losing weight.*
3. *Focusing on the behaviors that result in weight loss instead of the weight itself will always be a more successful endeavor. Be concerned with the behaviors that result in weight loss and fitness (be it eating more nutritiously or being more active), do them consistently, and then leave it to your body to do the rest. It knows what to do with what you give it without you thinking about it all the time.*
4. *It's a fact. Short-term dieting approaches don't work. Long-term approaches that take into consideration what is physically possible for the human body to accomplish are significantly more successful.*

Q In your chapter on Body Image, you said, "it is impossible to view ourselves from the perspective that others have of us." Would you elaborate on the steps to a positive body image?

The method I have found most successful with my patients in changing body image is to first focus on acceptance rather than “liking or loving yourself.” The first thing to accept is that we distort what we look like and that other people are more objective and accurate about what we look like than we are (for the reason stated above). Once we accept that point, we move to accepting our body the way it is right NOW – with all its flaws. Why? Because there are things we can’t change (so why let it make our life miserable) and because those things we can change or modify won’t be changed by us being preoccupied with them. The opposite is true. When we accept change it is easier. Once this step is accomplished, we can move to thinking of ourselves like we think of a loved one. We love them, not just regardless of what they look like, but sometimes because of those quirky flaws (our dad’s double chin, our grand mom’s squishy arms that hug so well). We then start trying to look at ourselves from this perspective. What is there about us that we want to treasure or we can appreciate? These steps eventually lead to loving ourselves but it all starts with acceptance.

Q Guilt and Shame vs. Concern and Remorse was another pivotal chapter in your book, and perhaps the most common psychological barriers for many people. Would you elaborate on the solution and how to change this mindset/belief?

Cognitive-behavioral therapy is one of the most researched forms of psychotherapy to date. It has been found to be more effective than many other methods in helping people change. This type of therapy involves looking at the way we think or what we say to ourselves continually throughout our days. This inner dialogue has the power to turn a rational (although perhaps negative) emotion into something extreme.

For example, two different people can experience the same situation (such as the break-up of a relationship) but have significantly different emotions – sadness vs. clinical depression. The event was the same but person 1 may say to themselves, “I really love him but he doesn’t want me. It’s going to really hurt and I’m really sad but I’ve done all I can do. I’ll have to learn to accept it and go on.” Person 2 may say, “I love him and I can’t live without him. I don’t want to live. I will kill myself.” The situation was the same, the thoughts are different. The normal reaction to a breakup is sadness and loss. Person 2 turned it into depression rather than sadness.

That is the difference between remorse and guilt (shame). It’s a matter of intensity due to the thoughts that are behind the emotion. One person can think, “I really regret that this didn’t work out but no one is perfect and I’ll continue to work at and get better.” Another person will say, “How can I have been so stupid. I can’t stand myself. What an idiot I am. I’ll never get it right. What will everyone think?” Who feels remorse and who feels guilt and shame?

Realistic negative emotions like remorse or regret lead to action and problem-solving while unrealistic, intense negative emotions lead to “stewing in our own juice” and quitting. Which is better?

Closing Thoughts

Effective and valuable insight from Dr. Rodriguez, which could be your “Go-to Guide” for weight and lifestyle management. The book is a useful tool for creating habits for a healthier life as it offers a fresh new perspective and step by step instructions on achieving success in weight loss and it can be applied for general self-improvement. It’s about awareness, acceptance, compassion and action. Your success can have a profound affect on someone else as it can motivate and inspire them to learn new habits for their own well-being. - DA

More About Dr. Lavinia Rodriguez

Dr. Lavinia Rodriguez is a clinical psychologist and an expert trained in treating eating issues and weight problems. For more than 30 years, she has observed how people set themselves up for failure through unrealistic diets and exercise programs, as well as through buying into out-and-out scams designed to take advantage of individuals who seriously want to improve their health and lives. She is concerned about people being misled regarding the most effective ways to lose and manage weight over a lifetime.

Over the years, Dr. Rodriguez has treated many people, has written articles on the subjects of eating disorders in particular and weight loss in general, and has written a book titled *Mind Over Fat Matters: Conquering Psychological Barriers to Weight Management*.

For more information, please visit www.fatmatters.com.

About the Book:

Mind Over Fat Matters: Conquering Psychological Barriers to Weight Management (iUniverse, 2008, ISBN: 978-1-4401-0228-8, \$14.95) is available at bookstores nationwide and through major online booksellers.

To listen to the complete Podcast Interview between Donna Adinolfi and Dr. Lavinia Rodriguez, please visit: <http://www.mindfuladventures.com/articles/>