

Dietitians for Social Justice

Welcome! We are a group of dietitians and others who are passionate about ensuring work around food and health builds a fairer, safer world for all. We want to support and educate ourselves and others as we work together for change across the whole food web. We believe that bringing ‘social justice thinking’ to nutrition talk changes how we think about wellbeing, kindness and equality and that this will influence the conversations we have in other areas of life too.

We came together in response to our frustration with mainstream food and nutrition work which puts too much focus on individual power and responsibility and plays down corporate and governmental power and responsibility. Three key premises of our work are that, one, we are not born into a fair world. Two, there is more to health than lifestyle. And three, eating significantly impacts quality of life in many ways, including and going beyond nutrient profile. Conventional nutrition messages are sometimes described as ‘neo liberal’ because they ignore the data on the impact of social inequality and support the narrative of ‘individual choice and lifestyle habits’.

At Dietitians for Social Justice we challenge neoliberal thinking and, as an alternative, promotes a vision of a world where no-one is starved of food, company or dignity. We do this by eschewing the conventional model that seeks health through ‘correcting’ lifestyle and weight. Instead we focus on promoting health-gain, in its widest sense, which includes promoting fair access to services and resources, plus valuing equality and diversity, including tackling size discrimination. We recognise the need to foster compassion and critical thinking and in this way we bridge self-care and social justice.



Why health-gain? Or, what’s wrong with lifestyle change? Where social factors do get mentioned in public health nutrition messages, they are typically only considered in material terms. In other words, the material effect of poverty, poor transport and so on in relation to access to food and cooking facilities.

We believe that food is a right and access to sustainable food that nourishes us, body and soul, is vital for physical, mental and overall wellbeing. So, lifestyle has a place. However, we also know that focusing on the material aspects of food alone will inadvertently increase health inequalities. This is because a range of inter-linked material and non-material factors impact our health. For example, imagine a large group of people whose lifestyles are the same. They eat the same and are similarly active. Within the group some people feel secure and valued, some are living with racism and some are in precarious employment. The evidence shows that those people experiencing insecurity and discrimination are at increased risk of nutrition-sensitive diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes and heart disease, regardless of lifestyle.

Taking the focus off weight and lifestyle doesn’t mean we ignore the fact that eating impacts wellbeing. It does mean we keep food in perspective and we do not ignore the

inconvenient truths of the metabolic effects of discrimination, trauma and privilege on diet-related illness. We want ‘good food for all’. We also acknowledge that first, good food for all will not by itself be enough to mitigate the health consequences of living with oppression. And second, that as long as the mind-set behind oppression exists we will never deliver on good food for all. As dietitians for social justice we want to surface these connections.

This shift in focus to advancing health-gain in its widest sense reflects an accurate and thoughtful reading of the evidence. It also enables us to work in ways that do not stigmatise people for their weight or health status and that support people of all sizes and backgrounds to develop a healthy relationship with food and their bodies.

In tackling size discrimination we promote body respect. We re-orientate to body respect for all to make oppressive weight concepts obsolete. We are building a world where people of all identities wake up certain in their self-worth. As a step on the way, we will mark progress when fat people are not routinely decapitated in stock images and when we are more mindful about how we talk to, and of, each other in relation to our physical appearance and size.

On board? Please do get in touch. We’d love to hear from anyone keen to promote social justice in and through food work. You don’t have to be a dietitian or health professional! We welcome all wavelengths of curiosity and energy.

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Press and Speakers

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Training

Dietitians for Social Justice draws on the Well Now philosophy developed by Lucy Aphramor. For Lucy’s training please see www.lucyaphramor.com

