After reading the book *Intuitive Eating*, I wanted to share some of the insights I gained. I highly recommend the book. It embraces the guiding principles of Wellness IN the Rockies and could be extremely helpful to chronic dieters. The authors describe many very heavy individuals who feel they have a fundamental character flaw, when they are simply suffering the predictable symptoms of chronic dieting. These observations are meant to “whet your appetite” so you are motivated to read the book.

* An ethical dilemma of the authors led to the concepts of the book. How could the authors, as nutrition counselors, ethically go on teaching clients information that was logically and nutritionally sound, yet triggered emotional upheaval and was ineffective? Healthy meal plans were not helping people maintain permanent weight loss.

* Even with the massive failure rate of dieting over decades of time, most people continue to blame themselves and each other instead of blaming the process of dieting.

* Losing weight and keeping weight off is usually not about a lack of knowledge. With this in mind, how can more nutrition education help individuals permanently lose weight?

* Many clients reported they felt they were living in a food police state run by the food mafia. *You’re not going to eat that high fat food, are you?* Foods are often described in moralistic terms - tempting, sinful, decadent.

* When people are underfed, whether from dieting or starvation, they obsess about food.

* Weight is increasingly difficult to lose as the yo-yo dieting pattern continues.

* Honor your hunger - otherwise you will trigger the primal drive to overeat. Feel your fullness. Pause while eating and ask yourself - how does the food taste?

* Using food to cope with emotions can vary from eating out of boredom to eating as the only comfort in a painful life.

* Accept your genetic blueprint. To quote the book - “A person with a shoe size of eight would not expect realistically to squeeze into a size of six.” Are you expecting your genetic blueprint body of size 12 or 14 to fit into a size 10?

* Make a conscious effort to stop the “body-check game” – comparing your body to everyone else’s when you walk into a room.

* Make food choices that honor your health, but strive for progress, not perfection. Becoming an *intuitive eater* is a process and a journey - complete with ups and downs.
* Making peace with food means giving yourself unconditional permission to eat. When you trust *forbidden* foods to be available to you, they lose their alluring quality. You eat less because you want less, not because you have superior willpower.

* Make eating a source of pleasure, not guilt.

* Even when the authors’ clients knew diets didn’t work, they would fall into the trap of yet another diet out of desperation to lose weight. Undereating triggers overeating and because of this, weight loss diets are doomed to fail.

* Could the harm from yo-yo dieting be greater than the risk of staying obese? Could *stabilized weight* (not weight loss) be a realistic and healthful goal for many people?

* Rebellion is a normal act of self-preservation. The “force of authority” is very great when it comes to eating (*don’t eat that candy bar, don’t eat so much*) and the rebellious state of overeating is predictable. The longer foods are prohibited, the more seductive they become. With *intuitive eating*, there is no need to rebel because no foods are forbidden.

* The almighty scale often ruins days, weeks, and even months of progress. The authors state when their sessions with clients began with weighing, discussions quickly turned into “scale-counseling” sessions. Why did the scale go up? Why didn’t it go down more? Since scales do not reflect body composition, the best bet for most people is to stop frequent weigh-ins.

* We often blame the media for our eating problems. Rats are not exposed to media influences, and yet when deprived of food, rats overeat. The more a person denies hunger (the basis of most diets), the stronger and more intense food cravings become. Research with neuropeptide Y, a chemical produced in the brain that triggers a drive to eat, provides scientific evidence that the biological consequence of many hours of undereating are intense food cravings.

* When people have denied their hunger for years, it is often difficult for them to “honor their hunger.” The authors recommend a general rule of not going longer than 5 waking hours without eating. Most people who go more than 5 hours without eating tend to overeat.

* According to the authors, *legalizing* food is a critical step when making peace with food. The authors promote giving yourself “unconditional” permission to eat. They describe a client who gave herself unconditional permission to eat forbidden foods. She went through a red licorice phase, a Pop Tart phase, and even a mashed potato phase. She discovered when she ate these foods in an unrestrained manner, the desire for each food would eventually peak and then taper off. After she completed the “food-freeing” phase, cravings for the food would stop and eventually, she hardly ever thought of a particular food.

* Part of the process of making peace with food is to give yourself permission to eat again when you are hungry. This allows you to stop eating when you are comfortable because you know you can eat again anytime you want. This is in complete contrast to a diet mentality where people unknowingly overeat to compensate for all the fasting to come.
* Somewhere between the first and the last bite of food, most of us fall into a state of unconscious eating - we don’t really taste the food or remember putting bite after bite into our mouths. The authors recommend replacing unconscious eating with conscious eating. When you are truly satisfied with an eating experience, you naturally eat less food.

* Of the authors’ clients, one described avoiding chocolate at all costs. After nibbling on carrot sticks, celery sticks and other “allowed” foods to avoid the “forbidden” food, the client was still not satisfied and ended up eating several chocolate cookies. Ironically, if the client had allowed herself to eat the desired cookie, she would have consumed far fewer calories. The authors have discovered that convincing clients to have complete pleasure and satisfaction from every eating occasion results in decreased food intake.

* To fully enjoy food, it must be eaten slowly. Take your taste buds on a “sensory joy ride.” The authors remind us our taste buds are on our tongue, not in our stomach.

* Rushed eating and windshield dining do not qualify for conscious eating.

* Using food to cope with life’s emotions is common. “Food is love, food is comfort, food is reward, food is a reliable friend.” Many people eat to fill unmet needs in their life. Food can be a powerful distraction from dealing with unwanted feelings.

* A new concept for me from the book was the idea of overeating having a positive side. Overeating is a coping mechanism. Some individuals may actually survive overwhelming situations by experiencing the comfort provided by food. Unmet emotional needs must be addressed. If we try to decrease overeating without addressing unmet emotional needs, are we doomed to failure? Is this one reason most efforts to address obesity have failed?

* Learning to accept and respect your body, complete with its imperfections, is a tall order. Most of us have difficulty accepting a simple compliment.

* Women must stop shopping for their “future bodies.” Buying attractive, comfortable clothes that fit is part of the self-acceptance process.

* We need to make celebrating size diversity as successful as the efforts with celebrating cultural diversity. We may not agree on the term (weightism, fatism), but society, in general, tolerates prejudicial acts against bigger body sizes (jokes, hiring practices, promotional practices, teasing). Thin and small individuals also experience size prejudice.

* In 1990, the U.S. Dietary Guidelines eliminated the word “ideal” when referring to recommended body weights. What is a person’s ideal body weight? To answer that, wouldn’t we need to know more than height and weight? What about genetics, diet history, number of fat cells? The authors promote a natural healthy weight – or the weight obtained from a healthy lifestyle.

* The weight many people want to achieve has more to do with aesthetics and societal norms than health.

* The authors describe clients having difficulty maintaining a physically active lifestyle while dieting. They compare this to expecting a car to operate with an empty tank of gas.
* We should promote physical activity by focusing on *how it feels*. Positive outcomes of physical activity include higher energy levels, better stress coping skills, a general sense of well-being, a sense of empowerment, and sounder sleep. If all the benefits of physical activity were fully experienced, who would ever want to stop? Clinical benefits are equally impressive (improved bone strength, decreased blood pressure, increased lung and heart strength, increased metabolism from maintaining lean body mass, and reduced risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension and some cancers).

* Inactivity is not just for *couch potatoes*. Many physically inactive people spend very little time on a couch with a remote control. Busy is not the same as physically active. The authors offer a new way of thinking – make physical activity a *nonnegotiable priority*.

* One way to encourage a new way of thinking about physical activity is to ask - *Can you afford the time to be sick?* If not, invest the time to take care of yourself through healthful and pleasurable eating and daily physical activity. If your appointment book is your guide, make a daily appointment for physical activity and honor it as an important meeting.

* Lean muscle mass declines with age. Even vigorous aerobic activity does not completely protect us from muscle-wasting due to age. Strength training is an important component of physical activity. Strength training does not have to be void of fun - add your favorite music, or work out with a friend.

* The authors promote a concept they call *gentle nutrition*, where taste is important and health is honored without guilt.

* In the processed-food environment of today, it is easy to fall short of the body’s fiber needs. Fresh fruits and vegetables offer not only fiber but also antioxidants, phytochemicals, and a host of other nutrients. The authors observe - “We’ve never seen anyone get into trouble eating fresh fruits and vegetables, unless that’s all they eat.”

* The authors encourage their clients to eat more beans, suggesting they are worthy of more than the “honorable mention” they receive in many nutritional guidelines. The authors also highlight the importance of consuming adequate calcium-rich foods to maintain bone health and adequate daily water consumption.

* “Contrary to popular belief . . . fat is a nutrient.” The book reviews the “fat trap” where people are obsessed with counting fat grams and end up decreasing their consumption of fat without decreasing caloric intake. The authors note - *fat free does not mean calorie free*. Lower fat foods were less satisfying to many clients, and consequently, some ate more total calories on low fat food products.

*Intuitive Eating* is a book by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, New York: St. Martin’s Paperbacks, 1996. Insights included in this handout are from “Insights from *Intuitive Eating*” by Betty Holmes.