



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

July 3, 2007

Secretary Michael O. Leavitt  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

On behalf of the 148,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing regarding the HHS Small Step Obesity Prevention Campaign. APA shares your concern regarding the growing obesity epidemic in the U.S. and applauds your ongoing commitment to address this important public health problem.

We believe that the Small Step campaign message, "*Take a Small Step to Get Healthy*," is an important one in the dialogue on sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits. We are however concerned that some of the accompanying advertisements include language and images that may have unintended negative consequences. In particular, the use of derogatory terms, such as "thunder thighs" and "spare tire," and focus on individual body parts may promote body dissatisfaction and self-objectification in viewers.

Studies suggest that objectification may undermine confidence in and comfort with one's own body and lead to negative consequences including shame, anxiety, and self-disgust. Self-objectification and chronic attention to physical appearance leave fewer cognitive resources available for other mental and physical activities. Further research indicates that body dissatisfaction may actually lead to disordered eating, including binge eating behavior. In contrast, strategies that promote body satisfaction may be more effective in preventing both obesity and disordered eating than those that increase body dissatisfaction.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you on these issues and hope that you will consider APA a resource in your work to promote healthy lifestyles across the lifespan. If we can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact our Government Relations Office at (202) 336-6062.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Keita".

Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.  
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