



**Worth the Weight:
How happiness corresponds with dieting**

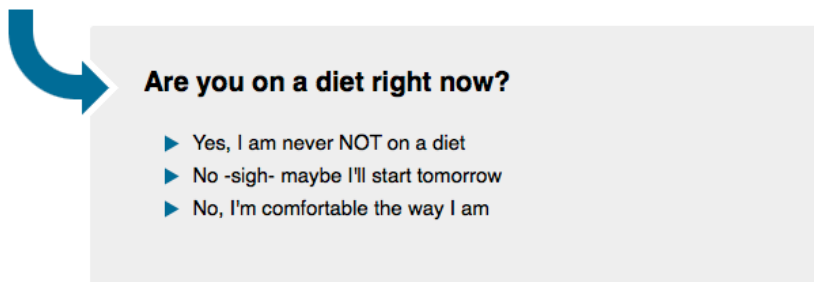
April 5, 2010

Introduction

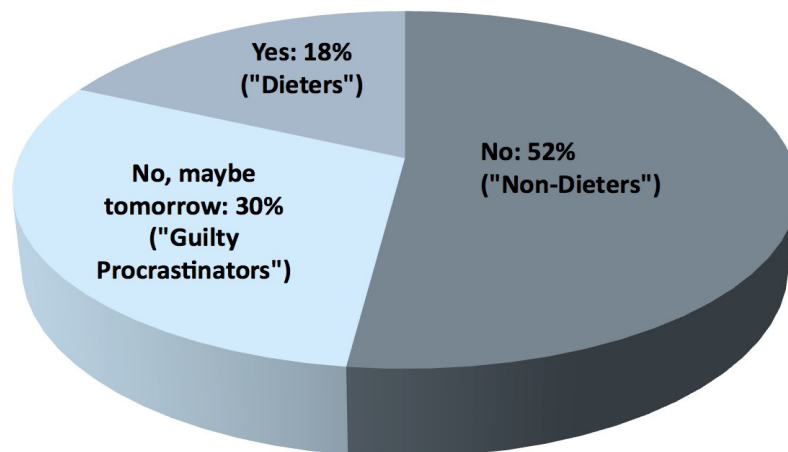
Our society is [obsessed with weight](#). We read tabloids that scream out headlines about celebrities' bodies, watch reality television shows in which contestants compete to lose weight, and obsess over our own bodies, trying all kinds of [fitness gadgets](#) and [diets](#) to help us reach our goals.

With all the focus on having a perfect body, are people actually happier for making the effort? Or is it better to just accept yourself as you are?

To answer these questions, we examined aggregate data from more than 13,000 Hunch users who answered this question:



...which yielded these results:



Among 13,222 Hunch users. Margin of error is 1%

Key findings in a chocolate-covered nutshell

We found that “Dieters” are eating healthfully and tend to be adventurous eaters. Even though many are carrying extra weight, they exercise consistently and are in reasonably good physical shape. We’ll see that they may be motivated to diet as a result of their increased interest in pop culture and fashion. They’re concerned with the image they project and they work hard to maintain it.

It turns out that “Dieters” and “Non-Dieters” are equally happy with their lives. But it’s a different story for those who are somewhere in between those two states. We’ll call this group the “Guilty Procrastinators”, and it turns out that they are, in fact, less happy than the other two groups. The lesson is that you should either love your imperfect self or take action to do something about it. Just don’t keep yourself in diet purgatory.

Don’t Worry, Be Happy...and also be willing to love your beautiful, fat self

Let’s call it like it is: the popular perception of diets is that they’re about as fun as a root canal. Deprivation, starvation, bland food...sounds like a prison sentence.

What we saw when we analyzed the data, however, is that self-described Hunch Dieters are *not* starving themselves. Rather, they’re eating more healthfully and enjoying food just as much as, if not more than, Non-Dieters. So are Dieters miserable or not?

A dieter is just as likely to [consider him/herself a “happy person” as a non-dieter](#); more than two-thirds of each group consider themselves happy. What’s more, Hunch users’ answers to the question [“When will you be happy?”](#) reveal that an equal percentage of Dieters and Non-Dieters say they’re “already there.”

Dieters and Non-Dieters are also [equally likely to be optimists](#) (about two-thirds of each), and they’re [equally likely to say](#) that the grass is greener on their side. And why shouldn’t they say it? Most of them [say they know who they are](#) and that [they like themselves most of the time](#). Sure, Non-Dieters are just [a bit more likely to say](#) that the person they were 10 years ago would be happy with them today, but overall, Dieters and Non-Dieters are both doing pretty well.

So overall it seems to be an incorrect perception that [Dieters are generally unhappy](#).

“Guilty Procrastinators” aren’t dieting but think they should be; they’re unhappy as a result

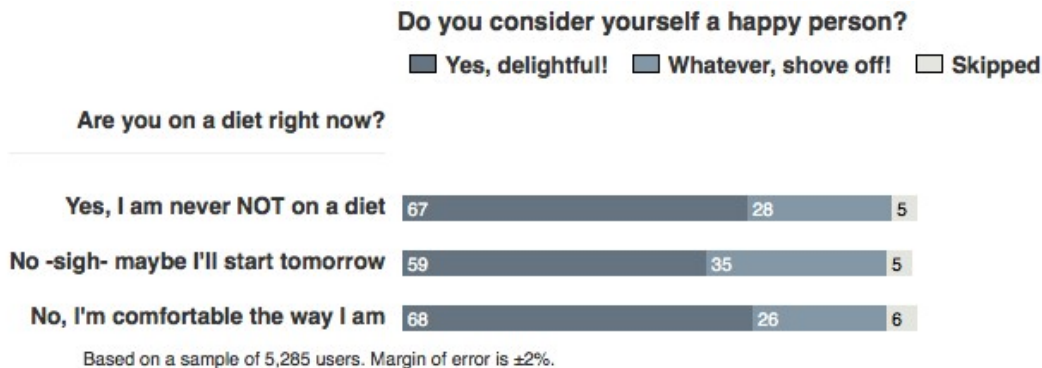
There’s an important third group of people in our study who show a different pattern, however. These are the 30% of Hunch users who are “Guilty Procrastinators”. They aren’t on a diet but say that they’ll “sigh – maybe start tomorrow.”

Guilty Procrastinators are [less likely to say](#) that they’re “already there” in response to “When will you be happy?”. They’re also [less likely to](#) consider themselves a “happy person” compared to the Dieters and

Non-Dieters, and are [slightly more likely](#) to be pessimists. The Guilty Procrastinators are [more](#)

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[likely to say](#) they don't really know who they are and are [less likely to say](#) they like themselves most of the time. And they are [more likely to say](#) that the grass is greener on the other side.



What's the lesson here? If you [can become comfortable with who you are](#) (like the Non-Dieters) or take action to make a change in your life (like the Dieters) then you're more likely to be happy. But if you aren't comfortable with yourself and aren't doing anything about it, that can take a real toll on your emotional outlook.

Overall differences in Dieters, Non-Dieters, and Guilty Procrastinators

Guilty Procrastinators:
"Supersize it, please (and pass the salt while you're at it)"

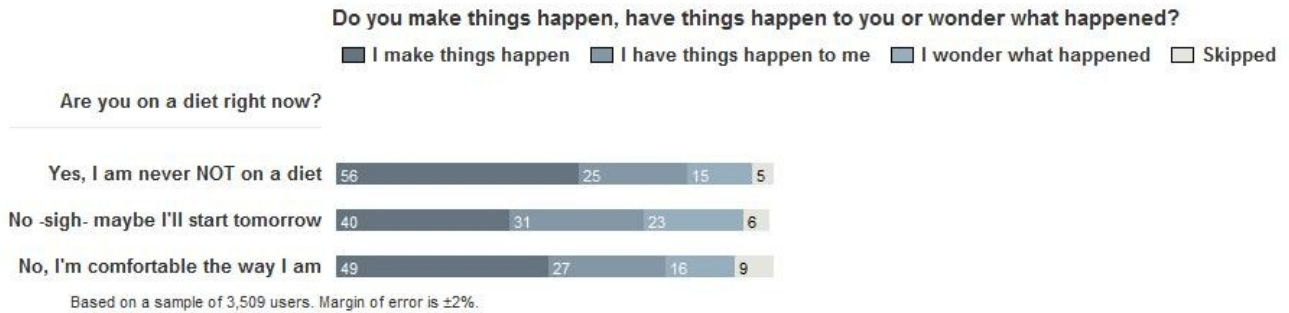
On some of the measures we'll explore in this report, the Guilty Procrastinators either share similar characteristics with Dieters or Non-Dieters or else they fall squarely in the middle of the two groups. But on a few measures, like some food habits, they stand out: they're [more likely to](#) snack between meals, they eat at fast food restaurants [more often](#) (and ["supersize" it](#)), and are [more likely to](#) drink soda, put [extra salt on their food](#) and [consume less fruit](#).

The Guilty Procrastinators also tend to [exercise less frequently](#) and are more likely than the other groups to have a ["few extra pounds"](#) or [be overweight](#). They have [less stamina](#) and [more than half](#) say it would take them more than 10 minutes to run a mile. The big difference between them and the Dieters is that they know they could make more positive changes in their lives, but they aren't doing it. As a result, they don't see as positive outcomes for themselves. They are [more likely to](#) think that their waistline will expand in two years and they are [less likely to](#) say that they "never get sick".

Why aren't the Guilty Procrastinators taking charge of their health? Because apparently they have other things going on. They're [slightly more likely to](#) have kids under 10 in their households, and it's probably not unrelated that they [aren't as likely](#) to get enough sleep or feel [well-rested in the morning](#).

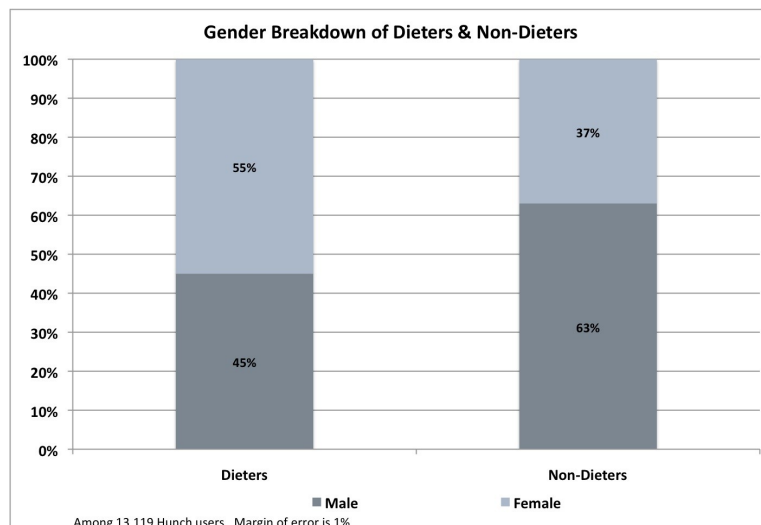


We also see that the Guilty Procrastinators lack some of the “can-do” attitude that the Dieters and Non-Dieters share. They’re [less likely to](#) consider themselves a success and tend to procrastinate [a bit more](#) than the Dieters. Dieters have a [“work first, play later” attitude](#) that’s very helpful when it comes to self-discipline. They also have more control in their life—they tend to take charge and [make things happen](#), which is exactly what they’ve done with their lifestyle.

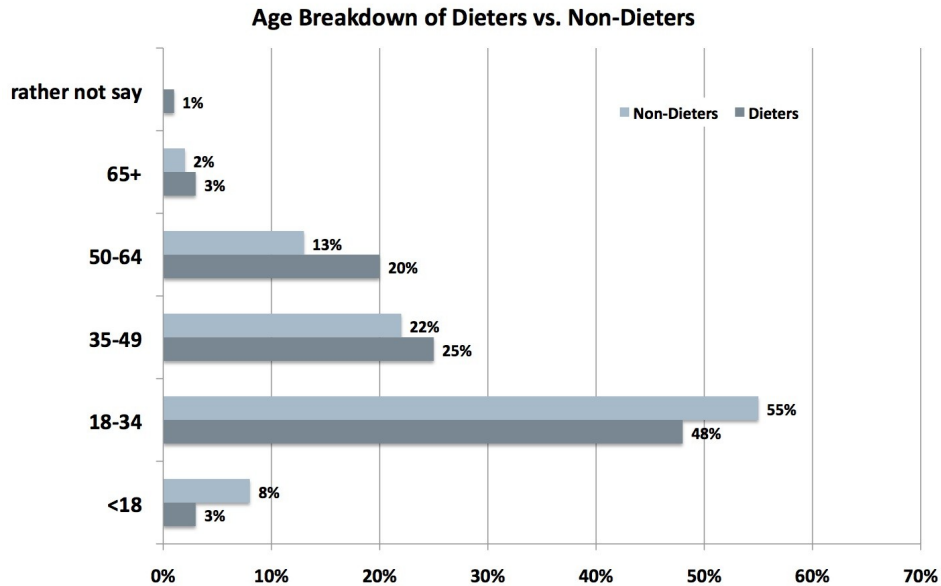


Who Are These People?

Everyone’s got that annoying friend who orders only a salad and water when they go out to eat. Stereotypes of Dieters aside, what basic characteristics do Dieters share? Despite women bearing the brunt of the societal pressure to stay thin, [only 55%](#) of current Dieters in our sample are female. However, men make up almost two-thirds of those who say they aren’t dieting and are comfortable with themselves (the Non-Dieters).



[Almost half](#) of Hunch Dieters are 35 or older. Maybe they're trying to slow down the midlife weight creep? By contrast, almost two-thirds of Hunch Non-Dieters are under 35. Ah, youth. Just wait till the Non-Dieters hit their midlife crises—they'll likely be calorie-counting as well.



Among 13,457 Hunch users. Margin of error is 1%

Taking the “Die” out of Diet

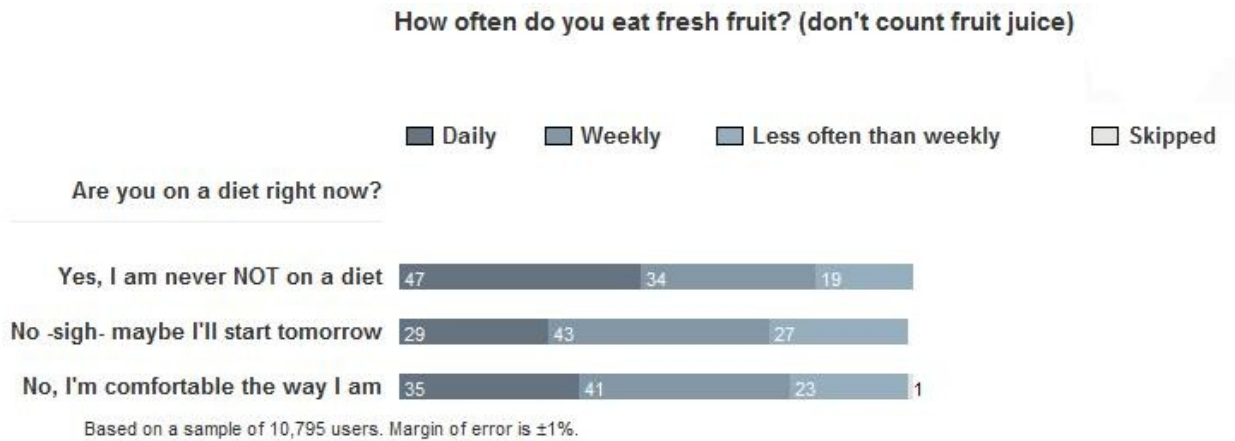
**Healthier-than-thou:
Self-described dieters
aren't just abstaining;
they consistently make
healthier food choices**

Some people hear “diet” and immediately think rabbit food or [crash diets like the Master Cleanse](#). But the Dieters on Hunch aren't necessarily depriving themselves compared to the Non-Dieters. Rather, their eating habits tend to be more about choosing healthy options instead of self-deprivation:

- Dieters are more likely to get their 8 glasses of water a day. [Over half](#) tend to drink water with dinner and they're [more likely to](#) drink 4+ glasses of water a day.
- When Dieters drink soda, they're [more likely to](#) go for diet than the Non-Dieters. But it's the Non-Dieters who are more likely to not even drink soda in the first place—47% abstain.
- Nearly [twice as many](#) Dieters than Non-Dieters are OK with artificial sweeteners as sugar substitutes.
- Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Dieters know this—[71% of them](#) say they normally eat breakfast during the week, compared to 63% of Non-Dieters.

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- Dieters are also [more likely to](#) eat fresh fruit regularly. Almost half eat fruit daily, while just over a third of Non-Dieters nosh on fruit on a daily basis.



- More Dieters than Non-Dieters choose multigrain bread—[82% versus 70%](#).
- [Dieters eat more seafood](#)—they're 24% more likely to say they "love it and can't live without it" compared to Non-Dieters. And we're not talking about the fried, battered stuff with mayo-based tartar sauce, either. Only 3% of Dieters said that they preferred their seafood that way.
- If they had to, Dieters could go without animal products entirely. Even though [most of them](#) aren't vegetarians, 33% would consider [becoming vegan](#), but only 24% of Non-Dieters would.
- Dieters are [more likely to](#) choose thin-crust pizza instead of more caloric regular crust pizza.

Surprisingly, Dieters are more adventurous eaters than Non-Dieters (maybe too much of that is why they're dieting in the first place?). More Dieters [enjoy gourmet dining](#), have [eaten caviar](#), have [toured a winery](#), and they're [more likely to](#) consider themselves "foodies" than Non-Dieters. They find smaller portions that are artfully arranged and garnished (a hallmark of expensive gourmet restaurants) [more appealing](#) than Non-Dieters do. They're also [more likely to](#) go for really spicy food, which can actually [help burn calories](#). Dieters really do love their food—46% said they ["live to eat,"](#) compared to 38% of the Non-Dieters, who tend to say they "eat to live".

But lest it appear that the Non-Dieters are a bunch of gluttons and the Dieters are angelic in their eating habits, you should know that they do have some eating habits (both good and bad) in common:

- Dieters and Non-Dieters are [equally likely to](#) have dessert, usually about once or twice a week.

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- They have [similar skills](#) in the kitchen—hardly anyone is Julia Child, but most can hold their own, although Dieters are [slightly more likely](#) to cook multiple meals a day at home.
- Dieters eat at fast-food restaurants [equally as often](#) as Non-Dieters, usually at least a few times per month, although they're [more likely to](#) choose healthier options at restaurants than Non-Dieters. However, [neither group is likely](#) to “supersize” their meals.
- Dieters and Non-Dieters are [equally likely to](#) find a bacon double cheeseburger delicious and [have no differences](#) in which kinds of fries they find the most appealing.
- Dieters and Non-Dieters are [equally likely to](#) snack in between meals (although the Dieters may be making healthier snack choices).
- [Both groups](#) eat in front of the computer, at least sometimes, despite advice that [distracted eating](#) can lead to ignoring important satiety cues.

Overall, we see that Hunch users who diet make healthful choices when it comes to food, but the Non-Dieters aren't doing so badly either. Perhaps the most important bit to keep in mind is this: when asked if they think they'd be able to resort to cannibalism in a survival situation, Non-Dieters were [slightly more likely](#) than Dieters to say that they would. So next time you're choosing your companion for that [pleasure cruise](#), maybe you should choose a friend on a diet. Don't say we didn't warn you.

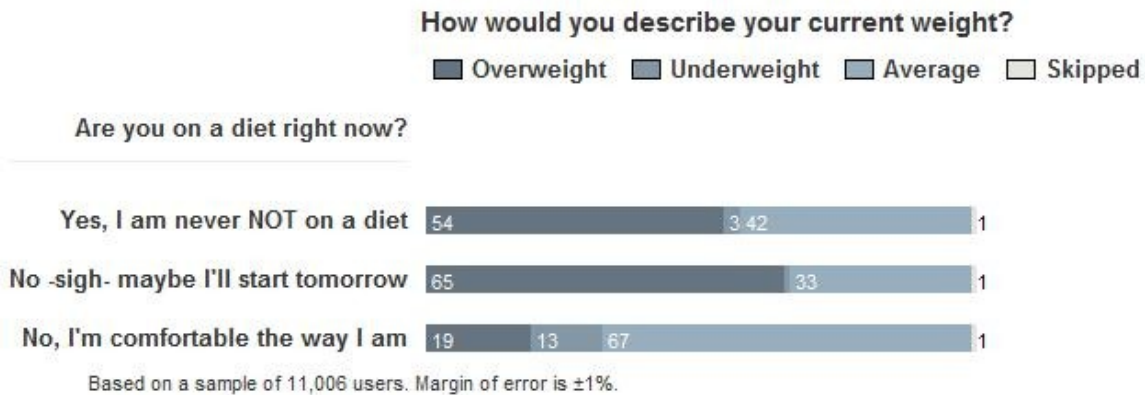


How about a hand for healthy eating?

Dieters: Kicking Bad Habits (and your butt at the gym)

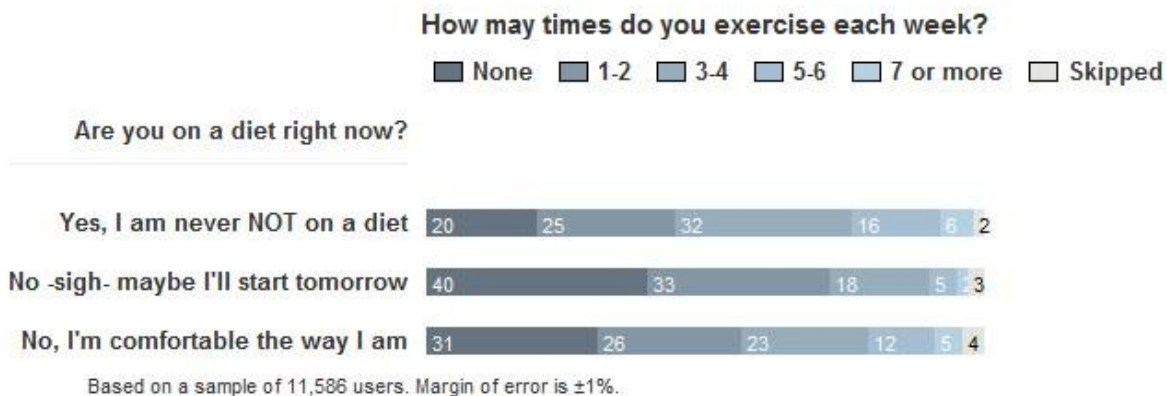
People diet and exercise for different reasons. Some want to be healthier overall, and some want to look good for beach season. We examined Dieters' and Non-Dieters' overall health and fitness to see how each group is doing body-wise.

Dieters are more likely to describe themselves as having [“a few extra pounds”](#) or being [“overweight.”](#)



This explains at least part of why they tend to [exercise for weight control](#) or weight loss. Non-Dieters are [more likely to](#) describe themselves as “lean and toned” to “average” and [exercise for strength](#) or because they enjoy it. [Most Dieters know](#) their body mass index (BMI), and may use it to track their progress, despite [known problems](#) with this measure.

OK, Dieters may have a greater tendency to be overweight, but so what? They’ve still generally kicked themselves into gear: Dieters are [more likely to](#) belong to a health club or gym than Non-Dieters, and [most Dieters](#) exercise at least 3 to 4 times a week (54% compared to 40% of Non-Dieters), even though it can be more of a struggle for them to [make it a habit](#). They’re also 23% [more likely to](#) do yoga than Non-Dieters.



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Dieters are more likely to be able to do 10 pushups and are more likely to cite strength as their best physical attribute

Even though Dieters are less likely to exercise to increase strength, they're [58% more likely](#) than Non-Dieters to cite strength as their best physical characteristic (Non-Dieters, on the other hand, are more likely to cite their agility). [More Non-Dieters](#) believe that they can do 10 pull-ups, but considering their leaner body composition, they might be lifting less weight in a pull-up, accounting for that ability. Or they could be overconfident—when was the last time you saw someone bust out 10 pull-ups? The Non-Dieters also think they could [run a mile](#) in under 10 minutes (65% believe they can, compared to 54% of Dieters).

This isn't to say that the Non-Dieters are running circles around the Dieters. [Both groups](#) rate themselves at similar levels of physical flexibility and are [fairly close](#) in terms of energy level and stamina. Overall, Dieters and Non-Dieters rate their health [similarly](#) and spend few days at home [sick in bed](#). All this working out and dieting is paying off--[two-thirds](#) of both groups think they'll live to see age 85. Although in the short term, [more of the Dieters](#) than Non-Dieters believe that they'll be able to keep their waist size from expanding an inch or more in the next two years.



There's some evidence that past health issues could motivate Dieters to lead more healthy lifestyles. [Almost half](#) of Dieters have been under general anesthesia more than once, compared to only 38% of Non-Dieters (we know it was likely not for cosmetic surgery, even though Dieters are [more open to it](#)). Dieters are [16% more likely](#) to be scared of death than Non-Dieters, and [almost a third](#) cite "my health" as the issue that causes them the most concern among 4 common sources of angst.

"I'm starting with the man (woman) in the mirror..."

Media

Experts [conduct studies](#), [analyze influences](#), and [generally have a lot to say](#) about the relationship between media and body image. We took a look at some of the media preferences of Hunch's Dieters and Non-Dieters to see if there are any potential correlations.

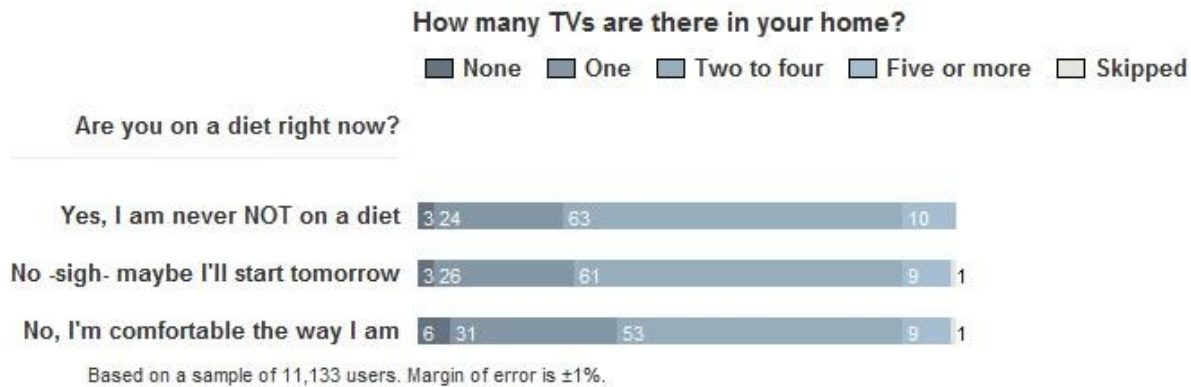
Fashion and celebrity-oriented magazines often bear the brunt of the criticism for negative influences on body image. Dieters are [slightly more likely](#) than Non-Dieters to say they read magazines most often, and are [more likely to](#) have at least one magazine subscription (type unspecified, but they are [75% more likely](#) to pick up *People* in a waiting room than Non-Dieters).

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Dieters are 65% more likely to be interested in celebrity gossip

Overall, Dieters are [65% more likely](#) to be interested in celebrity gossip and [more Dieters](#) than Non-Dieters tend to like watching awards shows like the Oscars and Grammys. [More Dieters](#) find the idea of fame and celebrity appealing, even if it means losing privacy or anonymity, and [most think](#) it would be exciting to be in the “movie business”. Although we usually think of celebrity emulation as more of teenagers’ domain, adults could be doing it too, and changing their lifestyles as a result.

Dieters also [watch more TV](#)—75% watch at least an hour a day; 65% of Non-Dieters watch that much on a daily basis. They’re also [27% more likely](#) to have multiple TVs in their home. Dieters are [40% more likely](#) to like reality shows than Non-Dieters. With all the celebrity and fitness-related shows, it makes sense that “reality” programming would appeal to Dieters.



Body/Self Image

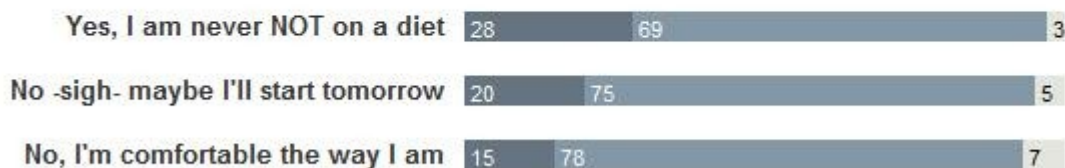
We’re not saying that Dieters are vain (well, actually we are...), but they certainly do spend a lot of time on themselves. They’re [more likely to](#) blow dry their hair every day, [regularly moisturize](#) after they get out of the shower, and say that skin care is [“very important”](#) to them.

Out of those Dieters who wear makeup, [almost 60%](#) wear it every day, compared to fewer than half of Non-Dieter makeup wearers. (This is somewhat but not completely explained by the heavier female skew of Dieters vs. Non-Dieters.) Dieters also spend more on [toiletries](#) and [haircuts](#), are [more likely to](#) wear perfume and cologne every day, are [twice as likely](#) to have had a manicure in the last month and are [more likely to](#) have dyed their hair or get their [eyebrows professionally groomed](#) at least every now and then. Not surprisingly, Dieters are almost [twice as likely](#) to say that they’re “high maintenance.”

Are you high maintenance?

Absolutely, duh! No way Skipped

Are you on a diet right now?



Based on a sample of 3,186 users. Margin of error is $\pm 2\%$.

When it comes to fashion, Dieters are more likely to be in the know. They're [more likely to](#) have been to a fashion show and are [50% more likely](#) to own something from Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, or Gucci or say that [Chanel suits them](#). They're [more likely to](#) enjoy shopping for clothes and [tend to try on](#) a lot of clothes when they shop. Dieters are [slightly more likely](#) to define their style as traditional or preppy while Non-Dieters are more likely to define t-shirts as their style of choice.

Bottom line: Dieters like to look good, and dieting may be one way to help them achieve that goal.

Past experiences

Our experiences growing up can have lasting effects for how we deal with life as adults. For example, [bullying](#) can damage self-esteem, and it's often based on appearances.

Is past bullying partly responsible for Dieters' attempts to put forth a glam and fit image now? The answer is "maybe". Even though Dieters are [slightly more likely](#) than Non-Dieters to have been bullied in high school, most of them weren't. [Almost 75%](#) of Dieters, however, would "do things differently" if they had the chance to go back to their teenage years (really, besides the popular kids who peaked in high school, who wouldn't?). Even so, many people were sentimental about that time of their lives; Dieters are [19% more likely](#) than Non-Dieters to have bought yearbooks back in high school.



Summing it all up: Fit, Fat, and Fab

The data in this report help fight against the misconception that people can't be fit and a bit heavier than usual at the same time, despite [activists](#) who voice opinions to the contrary. It's entirely possible that they don't know what they're [talking about](#).

We found that Hunch's Dieters are generally eating healthfully and tend to be adventurous eaters. Even though many are carrying some extra weight, they tend to exercise consistently and are in reasonably good physical shape. They may even have better habits than those who aren't as motivated to control their weight.

There's also evidence that people who are mindful of their diet are mindful of how they present themselves in general, by being more interested in fashion and spending more time on their grooming routines. So ditch the stereotypes; heavier-than-average people are not all depressed, lazy gluttons who are digging their own graves by stuffing their faces with fattening foods.

Despite the uphill battle for fat acceptance, Dieters tend to be happy people. They tend to feel pretty good about themselves and are on equal footing with Non-Dieters when it comes to happiness. Both groups are doing much better than those who haven't reached the levels of self-acceptance and self-determination that Dieters and Non-Dieters exhibit.

The 30% of Hunch users who say they might start a diet "tomorrow" are a different story. They're the Guilty Procrastinators, and they are less happy than both Dieters and Non-Dieters across a variety of measures. The lesson is that the key to being happy is either loving your imperfect self or getting off your duff to do something about it.

Here's to you, Hunchers, whatever shape and size you are.



Methodology and disclaimers

Hunch was publicly launched in June 2009 and since then millions of people have used the site. More than 48 million THAY ("Teach Hunch About You") questions have been answered since that time. The motivation for people to answer Hunch questions is simply to receive better and more customized recommendations. For example, for the decision "Which magazine would I like?", Hunch would suggest a different answer to a "suburban working mom" than to a "college student in an urban area."

This research data is a by-product of Hunch's core business and mission, which is to provide smart recommendations to users. (a similar analogy might be the way search engines release data on popular searches. That data is a by-product of their core mission to help people find what they are looking for online). Summary findings in this report are generally noted only when there is a statistically significant difference in the answers of the subsets being compared.

It should be noted that Hunch is not a professional research organization and this data was not collected in a scientifically controlled way. For example, Hunch data is based on 1) a group of individuals who are by definition all users of the Hunch website; these users are likely more internet-savvy than the general population, more open to new technologies, and more interested in social media. The group, while large at millions of users, has not been weighted to reflect actual demographic segmentation, and is not necessarily representative of general populations. 2) Questions on Hunch are voluntarily answered by users who choose to answer them. Therefore it's possible that those users who skipped a question might have different views than those who answered a question.

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