

My weight is not my health

Sick of being fat-shamed whenever she gains a few pounds, Jamie Khoo argues that the reading on the scales is no reflection of her health

There was a woman I once knew, let's call her Angie, who maintained a running commentary about my body and weight for years.

Once, at a gathering, she shouted across the room: "Eh! You really put on weight, ar?" I was used to this blatant rudeness, but I certainly didn't expect what came next.

"You must be careful, you know. Your health," she said conspiratorially. Then, as she gestured towards my mother sitting not 10 feet away, she continued, "If not, you're going to end up like your mother." She rounded her arms out beside her, to indicate how big my mother was, just in case I didn't get it.

Angie was also the sort of woman who repeatedly nagged her perfectly healthy daughter about how fat she was. The poor girl had been on a diet since she was seven.

But let's be honest; these discussions with the Angies of the world are never really about weight or health — they're purely about aesthetics.

Admittedly, I've never been slim. For as far back as I can remember, I've been on the plump side — a fact that people constantly feel the need to remind me of. Perhaps the sight of me is offensive, perhaps my shape does not fit their cookie mould or perhaps, like Angie, they feel a righteous duty to safeguard my health.

The latter is probably the worst reason. It's a nasty jibe disguised as concern for something they know nothing about, because Angie, and everyone else who's ever fat-shamed me, has no idea how healthy or unhealthy I am.

I have regular medical checks; the most recent one showed a bill of health so clean it squeaked. I work out at least four times a week, drink loads of water and watch what I eat (most of the time). I'm conscious of the part of me that needs strengthening, but I'm

also aware of all the extraordinary, healthy things my body can do.

Of course, extreme weight fluctuations are a concern and should always be discussed with a doctor. But although conditions such as obesity and eating disorders are a very real threat to our health and wellbeing, we need to be more aware of our reactions and aversion to weight gain (or loss).

Unless there are severe and chronic weight changes, it's not a huge cause for alarm if someone increases or drops a dress size or two over a few years, nor is it necessary to point it out. Trust me, we all know — long before everyone else — when our bodies change.

For so long we've based our reading of a person's health entirely on their weight, but, unless we're qualified medical practitioners, what do we know about it?

Both my maternal grand-aunts weighed at least 200 pounds each at five foot two.

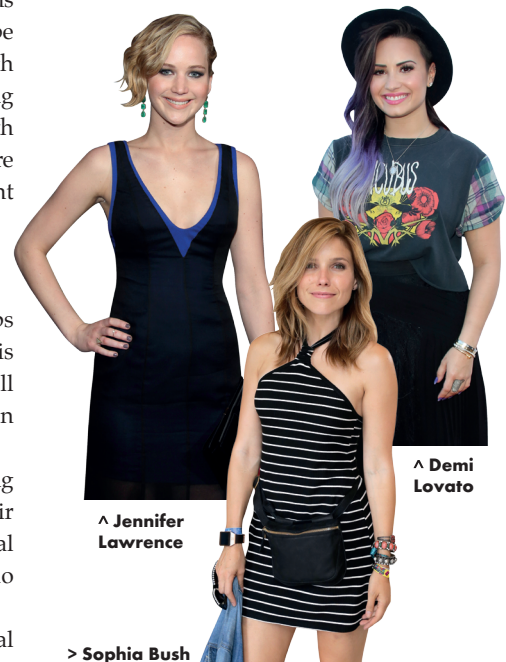
They'd always been overweight, but they exercised daily, enjoyed their food and lived well into their nineties, dying eventually of nothing more complicated than old age.

My paternal relatives, on the other hand, are all slim, health conscious and careful about their diet and exercise, but they're a smorgasbord of health problems — high blood pressure, high cholesterol, gout, diabetes and family histories of cancer and heart problems.

Weighing up my genes, I choose health over vanity and am keeping my fingers crossed that I take after my mother's side of the family. I'd much rather be chunky and carefree than svelte but sickly.

Health is made up of myriad factors — family history, genetics, how we're moving and eating, not to mention our mental and emotional wellbeing. Health could mean what I am now, all 150 pounds of me. Health could even look like you at 120 pounds or 200 pounds.

Celebrities we love for promoting positive body image ideals



^ Jennifer Lawrence

^ Demi Lovato

> Sophia Bush

“I'd much rather be chunky and carefree than svelte but sickly.”

We need to kill this belief that our health hinges solely on our weight and the shape of our bodies. We need to shift the focus away from scrutinising what our bodies look like and consider what's going on from the inside out.

We can start to be healthier right now by cutting out the harmful body shaming. For real, holistic health, let's stop wishing for some other person's ideal body. Let's strive for the best version of our own. □

SIX REASONS YOU SHOULD THINK TWICE BEFORE BODY SHAMING SOMEONE

- Losing weight doesn't always mean you're becoming healthier.
- Conversely, gaining weight doesn't always mean you're becoming unhealthier.
- A person's dress size isn't an indication of how attractive they are.
- Someone bigger or smaller than you could be healthier, stronger and fitter than you.
 - Body shaming does not make anyone — shamer or shamed — feel good about themselves.
- If you're body shaming others, your rudeness makes you look ignorant and unattractive.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES