

Kate Middleton just the latest bride to feel wedding-day weight blues

BY MISTY HARRIS, POSTMEDIA NEWS MARCH 21, 2011



Too thin? Too chubby? Kate Middleton's weight has been endlessly discussed in media circles, with some outlets reporting the willowy bride-to-be is "desperate to gain a dress size" while others claim a strict low-carb diet is part of her "wedding plan."

Photograph by: Reuters, xx

The royal wedding of the century is fast approaching and all eyes are on the bride-to-be, whose race to lose weight has seen her usually hearty lunch reduced to mere broth.

Even as she sacrifices, a malicious ballad makes its way through the streets of Britain: "He comes to take 'for better or for worse'/ England's fat queen and England's fatter purse."

It's 1840 and Queen Victoria, without knowing it, is at the forefront of a trend that will see countless brides — Prince William's fiancée Kate Middleton among them — have their looks analyzed from more angles than a professional golf swing.

The result, according to a study by Cornell University, is that 70 per cent of brides embark on a weight-loss mission, with the average woman hoping to shed upward of 20 pounds before her big day.

"They're on super-drive as far as being disciplined about diet and exercise . . . Every time they come into my office, they're smaller than they were before," says Calgary's Lisa Hanslip, a wedding planner for the past two decades. "I had one bride who quit her job so she could work with a trainer every day."

The Cornell study, published in the journal *Appetite*, finds aerobic exercise, drinking water, eating less, and limiting calories are the most common ways of losing weight. Of the more extreme measures, skipping meals and taking pills are reported most frequently, the study says. Fully 14 per cent of brides say they intentionally purchased a wedding dress that's too small for them.

Added up, it's easy to understand why the last decade has seen an entire cottage industry begin trading on women's pre-nuptial body anxiety — a phenomenon evident in everything from the rise of "bridal boot camp" to such TV shows as *Shedding for the Wedding* and *Bridalplasty*.

"Overall, it's gotten really out of control," says Hanslip. "If (your fiance) got engaged to one person and then sees a completely different person walking down the aisle, I think that's a bit crazy."

Middleton's weight has been endlessly adjudicated in recent weeks, with some outlets reporting the willowy bride-to-be is "desperate to gain a dress size" while others claim a strict low-carb diet is part of her "wedding plan."

For royal historians, it makes for an eerily familiar scene.

Sandra den Otter, an associate professor of history at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., recalls that "the pressure was on Queen Victoria to lose weight before her wedding to Prince Albert," with doctors recommending a regimen of exercise and broth for lunch — "a hardship for the young Queen, who had a robust appetite."

Alison McGill, editor-in-chief of Canada's *Weddingbells* magazine, suggests the majority of modern brides takes a more reasonable approach.

"I'd like to think women have greater perspective these days," says McGill, who points to *Bridalplasty* — in which brides competed to win pre-nuptial plastic surgery — as particularly misleading. "I think that show gave the public face of brides-to-be a bit of a bad rap."

For many women, however, the bridal body battle is one of quiet desperation, taking place beyond public view.

Caroline Adams Miller cites appearance pressure as the leading cause of a massive laxative overdose the night before her wedding — an incident she describes as one of the lowest points of her life.

"I don't remember the day with any kind of joy," says Adams Miller, a Harvard alumna. "It wasn't about love or family unity or hopefulness for the future; it was about what I looked like."

Adams Miller is now a coach and author who speaks out against the mechanisms driving "brideorexia," and against chasing weight-loss for purely extrinsic reasons.

"Not only do you pursue it with a certain amount of misery, you don't feel good once you accomplish (your goal) because it was always about other people," says Adams Miller, who hastens to add that people need only look to Middleton Mania for proof of the sex gap in physical expectations.

"Why aren't we talking about Prince William's hair-loss, for God's sake?"

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