No, obesity is caused by, "...the presence of tumors of the brain or the adrenal gland or it may follow encephalitis or brain surgery or infectious disease, operations, accidents, or in combination with mental deficiency and other developmental abnormalities," according to one expert.

No wonder we hate fat. Eeuch.

Despair Not

Yet despite every sensible, intelligent and rational thing Americans have been told about the "Importance of Good Nutrition," we still continue to search for an easy way out—a miracle cure for fat. For weeks we eat only boiled eggs and water, or milk and bananas, gnaw on celery and gum cottage cheese, or take Ex-Lax and pray.

"The biggest single mistake in dieting is the belief that there is some miracle way to lose weight and keep it off with no effort. There is no magic," said Dr. Neil Soloman, a psychiatrist from Johns Hopkins.

Spoil sport.

Nonetheless, one mustn't lose hope. Weight Watchers, started 13 years ago by a housewife from Queens, N.Y., is now a multi-million dollar international organization specializing in broiled herring. And for ye of little faith, there is Overeaters Anonymous, which works on the theory of "confess thy sins and tell us what you ate today."

Even the UK Med Center offers weight reduction workshops called "Leave Your Fat Behind." Clever. "We use behavioral modification techniques and focus on what goes on inside your head that makes you eat—the cognitive approach to losing weight," said assistant program coordinator Susan Gaffield. Gaffield works with small groups of people, concentrating on eating habits and anxiety. She talks a lot about "goal-oriented attitudes" and "reinforcement of rational responses."

But the best thing about her program is NO DIET. "We don't consciously put people on a diet," she said. "We just discuss what people are eating and why they're eating it. We want people to lose weight and maintain it. So we work within their lifestyles."

Perhaps the most popular weight reduction fad to come out of dietermania is the Spa—those last bastions of health food and nuts.

Going to a spa for the first time can either be a degrading, demoralizing and embarrassing trauma OR an ego-boosting pat-on-the-back...depending on how fat you are.

In my case, the embarrassment started before I ever got through the doors. I lied to my friends about where I was going. Admitting to a trip to the Spa is like saying you had your teeth capped. Everyone wants to be skinny, but no one wants the work to show.

I took a bath, washed my hair and put on clean underwear. (What if I had to go to the hospital or something?) Then, donned my basic black leotard—discreet and tasteful. Added a matching black ribbon and was off.

When I arrived I took a deep breath, sucked in my stomach and stepped through the huge, wooden doors. Gasp. The room is like a bad "artist's rendition" of the Roman Baths. The walls are lined with sleazy gold couches covered with red fuzzy dandruff from flocked wallpaper. Plaster figurines in classic Greek poses hold plastic ferns. Muzak hums discreetly in the distance.

Then my hostess arrived. A pert little number named Stephie or Joie or Charlie or something boyishly charming like that. I smiled. She was skinny. What was she doing here?

Stephie patted me on the back and took me off on a tour of the place...starting with the exercise room. A giant mirror covers three walls and the subtle light from two huge chandeliers reflects off the chrome and steel of exercise equipment: the rack, the iron maiden, the tower of London revisited.