

Improving Your Body Image: Tips for Individuals, Families, and Professionals ¹

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Our body image is a picture we have about our body's shape, size, and weight that comes from what we see in the mirror and our minds. Body image can be positive or negative, depending on what we “see” when we look at ourselves and the feedback we get from those around us. Messages from society, family, peers, and the media also contribute to the way we feel about ourselves or our body image. All of these factors working together create the individual views we have of our bodies.

If you have a positive body image, you feel proud of your body and have a realistic view of and expectations for your body. People with positive body images may occasionally feel self-conscious, which is normal, but do strive to celebrate and appreciate their bodies.

Unfortunately, some people have a negative body image. Shame, guilt, and anxiety about our bodies, and/or a distorted view of what we look like, can be signs of a negative body image. Seeing yourself as unattractive, unworthy, and awkward can be difficult, and may lead to more serious problems. People who struggle with negative body image often suffer from

depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders, and may even contemplate suicide. Whether you have a positive or negative body image, you can benefit from information to enhance your view of yourself. Here are some tips to help improve your body image.

Strive for a Healthy Body

Make it your goal to become healthy through regular activity and proper nutrition. Don't focus on weight, body size, and shape. Think about health, fitness and enjoying yourself.

Focus on Your Positive Points

Do not define yourself only by your appearance. Develop and nurture the many gifts, skills, and abilities that make you unique. Admire and accentuate the things about you that you feel good about. Remember that beauty is a state of mind that has infinite definitions.

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Limit Your Exposure to Negative Images from Your Environment

Research shows that the acceptance of negative images (from media, friends, family, etc.) poses more risk than being exposed to those images. Try to reject negative images from the environment by limiting the amount of time you spend with them.

(For example, people who judge you based on your appearance, magazines/television/movies focused on one standard of beauty, etc.)

Take Notice of All the Cool Things that Your Body Can Do

Remind yourself of the many things that you can do with your body – walking, running, jumping, dancing, breathing, laughing, hugging, smiling, etc. Practice them daily! Involve yourself in activities that help you tune into your body, such as yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi, etc.

Develop a Positive Social Support System

Surround yourself with people who are confident and encourage you to be your best. Build a network of friends, family, and co-workers who enjoy life and participate in your healthy lifestyle. Get a walking buddy or a lunch partner with healthy eating habits. Limit time spent with and place limits on people with whom you feel self-conscious and inferior. In addition, try to avoid those who point you towards unhealthy habits.

Devote Time and Energy Towards Helping Yourself and Others

Have a plan of action for those times when you may feel low. Turn your focus on helping and not hurting yourself. What can you do for yourself that would be positive? Make your day better. Take a walk, catch up with an old friend, play with a pet, etc. You may even turn your thoughts to making someone else's day better. Helping other people often makes us feel better about ourselves and our situations.

Keep in mind that this is not a complete list. There are many other things that you can do to boost

your body image. In fact, most of us are already contributing to our own positive body images without even realizing it. How often do you focus on your actions and who you are as a person instead of how you look? Do you ever say, “Good job, self!” or compliment yourself during the day?

By no means does this list include everything you can do to improve your body image, but it can be a starting point for action. Use it as a guide for creating a new, positive, encouraging perception of yourself. If you already have a positive body image, this can reaffirm the healthy habits you already have.

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