



Body Image: Fact Sheet

What is Body Image?

Body image is how a woman feels about her own physical appearance. It is the picture a woman has of her body and what she thinks it looks like to others. It is not based in truth but in what she sees as the truth.

Is Your Body Image Positive or Negative?

With a healthy body image a woman has a positive perception of her shape and size and she feels at ease with her body. With a negative body image, a woman has a distorted perception of her shape and size, compares her body to others and feels shame and anxiety about her body. Being unhappy with your body can lead to emotional suffering, low self-esteem, dieting, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. Developing a positive body image and a healthy mind-set is central to a woman's happiness and wellness.

Facts about Body Image

- Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- Body image is sensitive to your mood swings, physical environment, and your experiences.
- It is formed out of every experience you have ever had and all of the people around you; parents, role models, the media, and peers all influence your body image.
- The media often plays a negative role in shaping women's feelings, thoughts and behaviors.
- Our media-laden society usually makes women feel badly about their bodies no matter what they look like
- Repeated exposure to a particular image teaches us to like that image and reject what is different. We see so many images of thin, blonde, Caucasian women that we have learned to define this image as beautiful and to describe women who are different than this image negatively.
- Most advertisements intentionally make women feel inadequate so they will buy their products. Why? Because women feel tremendous pressure to be like the ideal (usually skinny) images they see in magazines, on television, and on the internet.
- We are bombarded by articles on exercise, fashion and dieting leading to the belief that women can attain self worth by changing their bodies. This is not true.

What Can We Do to Create a Positive Body Image?

- Look at yourself as a whole person. When you see yourself in a mirror or in your mind, choose not to focus on specific body parts. See yourself as you want others to see you—as a whole person.
- Realize that you have self-worth just the way you are.
- Remember the unreal ways women are shown in the media and be realistic
- Recognize advertisements for what they are –a sales pitch that is used to promote the sale of products
- Focus on health and well being instead of only appearance.
- Look for other ways to feel good about yourself besides physical appearance. For example you could pursue educational, spiritual and social activities.
- Surround yourself with positive people. It is easier to feel good about yourself and your body when you are around others who are supportive and who recognize the importance of liking yourself just as you naturally are.
- Focus on eating a wide variety of healthy foods and eat only when you're hungry (rather than when you're tired or upset)
- Wear clothes that you like and feel comfortable in
- Find balance in your life. A healthy lifestyle is one that is balanced. This means getting adequate exercise, eating a healthy diet and getting enough sleep. It means having fun and allowing yourself to have treats (a piece of chocolate cake every once in a while, etc.).

Where Can I Go for Help?

Sometimes low self-esteem and body image problems are too much to handle alone. Some women may become depressed; lose interest in activities or friends. If you are feeling this way, it can help to talk to someone.

Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre 477-1123
www.fgwrc.ca

Women's Health Clinic 947-1517
www.womenshealthclinic.org

Counselling 784-4067
Klinik Community Health Centre
www.klinik.mb.ca

Teen Clinic 784-4090
Klinik Community Health Centre
www.klinik.mb.ca

Eating Disorders Self-Help Program 953-2358
www.cmha.ca

Aulneau Renewal Centre 987-8880
www.aulneau.com/

Websites

Dove Campaign for Real Beauty

www.dove.ca

Our Bodies Ourselves Health Resource Centre

www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book/default.asp

Body Image Information

www.snac.ucla.edu/BodyImage.html

Book Resources

Erdman, Cheri K. *Nothing to lose: A guide to sane living in a larger body*. New York: HarperSan Fransisco, 1995.

Friedman, Sandra. *Body Thieves*. Vancouver: Salal Books, 2002.

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Hoffman, Eileen. *Our health, our lives: A revolutionary approach to total health care for women*. New York: Pocketbooks, 1995.

Johnson, Hal, Joanne McLeod. *Body break: Our guide to healthy living*. Ontario: Body Break Inc. 1999.

Kano, Susan. *Making peace with food: Freeing yourself from the diet/weight obsession*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989.

Lyons, Pat., Burgard, Debby. *Great shape: The first fitness guide for large women*. Bull Publishing 'Company, 1990.

Wann, Marilyn. *Fat!so?*. California: Ten Speed Press, 1998.