

Developing Healthy Body Image

So, how can one develop a healthier body image? Educating oneself about the influence of the media on body image is a good first step. This awareness may help you to begin to challenge the pull to live up to an unattainable and unrealistic standard of size and beauty. Although it may be difficult, since we know there is a connection between body image and the media, limiting exposure to certain forms of media, such as fashion magazines, may be helpful.

It may also be helpful to become aware of what factors, besides body size, shape, and weight, represent a healthy body, such as blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, physical fitness, or engaging in regular, enjoyable physical activity. Parents can help their children develop a healthy body image by encouraging self-acceptance, avoiding making critical comments about their child or adolescent's food intake or body weight or shape, and avoiding engaging in behaviors that communicate the promotion of poor body esteem, such as frequent dieting or self-deprecating talk about their own bodies.

Other simple methods can be used to promote a healthier body image such as:

- Practice regular acknowledgement of the parts of your body or your appearance that you like, not just your flaws.
- Make a list of the functions your body performs that you enjoy, such as walking, swimming, yoga, etc., and engage regularly in those activities that make you feel good in your body.
- Cut down or work towards stopping checking your body for flaws and comparing your body to bodies of others.
- Access self-help materials such as: *The body image workbook: An 8-step program for learning to like your looks* (by Thomas Cash), or *Building Body Acceptance: Overcoming Body Dysmorphia* (a consumer resource module offered online through the Centre for Clinical Interventions).

These changes can sometimes be difficult to implement on your own, especially since negative views of one's body tend to develop over a long period of time. Seeking support from a qualified mental health provider may be helpful when attempting to make positive changes in your body image, or for assistance coping with negative body image or body dissatisfaction. Remember that these simple strategies are recommended for those interested in making improvements in body image. They are not meant to serve as preventative methods or treatment interventions for serious mental health concerns, such as eating disorders. People who notice signs and symptoms of depression, anxiety, or eating disorders should seek professional treatment promptly.