

PERFECT BODY IMAGE

Everyone has a slightly different idea of the perfect body image but we are heavily influenced by societal pressures and the media. Society's expectations color our beliefs about the ideal body image and sometimes this creates problems or causes harm.



Society's Idea of the Perfect Body Image

Society tells us what kind of body image we should strive for. We see images of perfect bodies all around us, on television, in movies, in newspaper and magazine ads and online. Reporters and gossip columnists even comment on the appearance of people in the news and political figures. How often have you seen articles discussing Hillary Clinton's hairstyle or Michelle Obama's dress? They are not fashion models and their appearance is not

relevant to any of the work they do, yet it is a popular topic of discussion. No wonder so many people are worried about projecting the ideal body image!

The truth is that people come in all shapes and sizes and people of all shapes and sizes can be attractive. In fact, in past years curvy women were considered more attractive than very thin women. That is no longer the case today, though.

The Ideal Body Image for Women

If we consider society's idea of the perfect body image for women based on the average fashion model, we would think that the perfect woman was about 5'10" and weighed only 120 pounds. However, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that the average American woman is only about 5'4" and weighs about 169 pounds. There is a big discrepancy there. The ideal image of women also tells us that women should be blonde, tan and have big breasts. Of course, she should be young and somewhat athletic. She should not have any physical disabilities. It doesn't matter too much if she is smart, as long as she is physically attractive.

The Ideal Body Image for Men

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the average American man is about 5'9" and weighs about 190 pounds. The average male fashion model, though, is about 6'1" and only weighs about 160 pounds. That's not as ridiculously skinny as female models, but it's still thinner than the average guy. Of course, male models usually work out and have well-defined muscles, too. Unfortunately, many people see those images and believe that is the perfect body image.

Dangers of Striving for the Perfect Body Image



Most of us want to be healthy and the risks of obesity are well known. It's important to understand that the ideal body image as presented by the popular media is not healthy, however.

The female fashion model that weighs only 120 pounds has a body mass index of 17.2 and doctors consider anything under 18.5 underweight. While it is unhealthy to be overweight, it is also unhealthy to be underweight. Risks associated with being underweight include anemia, nutritional deficiencies, osteoporosis, cardiac problems, increased susceptibility to illness and infection and poor wound healing.

People that mistakenly assume the media images represent a desirable weight or good health may diet excessively in an attempt to match the images they see. Some people even develop eating disorders like anorexia or bulimia. Of course people suffering from anorexia and bulimia are not healthy and most people would agree that very underweight people aren't very attractive, either. People with eating disorders often have distorted body images, though. They believe they are fat and ugly even when they aren't.