

FAST FACTS: Body Image

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It is important to remember that *every body* is different- a fact that becomes particularly evident during middle school and adolescence. Each person has a different genetic makeup that influences bone structure, body size, shape and weight differently.

While it is difficult not to compare your body with your peers', it is important to focus on having a healthy body weight that allows you to feel strong and energetic. Eating balanced meals full of nutritious foods and enjoying regular, moderate exercise help you lead a healthy, normal life.

Body image becomes important during this age as it can play a role in more serious problems such as eating disorders, depression, and low self-esteem. Addressing a person with negative body image is a difficult, yet important, step in helping someone you care about avoid some serious life-long struggles.

Negative Body Image

- A distorted perception of your shape- perceiving parts of your body unlike they really are
- You are convinced that only other people are attractive, and that your body size or shape is a sign of personal failure
- You feel ashamed, self-conscious, and anxious about your body
- You feel uncomfortable and awkward in your body

People with negative body image have a greater likelihood of developing an eating disorder and are more likely to suffer from feelings of **depression, isolation, low self-esteem, and obsessions** with weight loss.

Body Image and Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are complex conditions that arise from a combination of long-standing behavioral, emotional, psychological, interpersonal and social factors. While they may begin with a preoccupation with food and weight, people with eating disorders often use food and the control of food in an attempt to compensate for feelings and emotions that are overwhelming and painful.

Psychological Factors that Contribute to Eating Disorders:

Low self-esteem
Feelings of inadequacy or lack of control in life
Depression, anxiety, anger or loneliness

Interpersonal Factors that Contribute to Eating Disorders:

Troubled family and personal relationships
Difficulty expressing emotions and feelings
History of being teased or ridiculed based on size or weight
History of physical or sexual abuse

Social Factors that Contribute to Eating Disorders:

Cultural pressures that glorify "thinness" and value obtaining the "perfect" body
Narrow definitions of beauty
Cultural norms that value people based on physical appearance

How to Help a Friend with Eating and Body Image Issues

- Learn as much as you can about eating disorders.
- Know the differences between facts and myths about weight, nutrition, and exercise. This may help you recognize inaccurate ideas or excuses your friend may be using.
- Be honest. Talk openly and honestly about your concerns with the person who is struggling with eating or body image problems. Ignoring it won't help!
- Be caring, but firm. Caring about your friend does not mean being manipulated by them. Your friend must be responsible for his or her actions and the consequences of those actions. Avoid making rules, promises or expectations that you cannot or will not uphold.
- Compliment your friend's wonderful personality, successes, or accomplishments- remind him or her that "true beauty" is simply skin deep!
- Be a good role model in regard to sensible eating, exercise, and self-acceptance.
- Tell someone. Addressing body image or eating problems in their beginning stages offers your friend the best chance for working through these issues and becoming healthy again. Don't wait until the situation is so severe that your friend's life is in danger. Telling someone may also help you receive the support you need during this time.

10 STEPS TO POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

1. Appreciate all your body CAN do!
2. Keep a top-10 list of all the things you like about yourself- things that aren't related to how much you weigh or what you look like. Review this list often!
3. Remind yourself that "true beauty" is not simply skin deep.
4. Look at yourself as a whole person- not specific body parts.
5. Surround yourself with positive people.
6. Shut down negative thoughts in your head- overpower them with positive ones.
7. Wear clothes that are comfortable and make you feel good about your body.
8. Become a critical viewer of social and media messages.
9. Do something nice for yourself!
10. Use the time and energy you spend worrying about food and your weight to do something to help others. This will help you feel better about yourself and you can make a positive change in the world.

RESOURCES:

National Eating Disorders Association
Information and Referral Helpline:
1-800-931-2237

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

Eating Disorder Resource Center

www.edrcsv.org

Eating Disorder Hope

www.eatingdisorderhope.com

All information on this FAST FACT sheet is
attributed the National Eating Disorders
Association

www.nationaleatingdisorders.org