

BODY IMAGE & EATING CONCERNS

Body image and eating concerns often go hand in hand. Body Image refers to a representation that you have of your physical appearance. Occasionally, people feel dissatisfied with certain aspects of their body. We are overwhelmed with societal messages of how we "should look," which can increase any negative thoughts about our bodies. These negative thoughts can lead to increased worry or distress and a preoccupation with the concerned body area. Worrying about the way you look and what others think of you, could have many negative implications for your general functioning.

Several factors may increase the likelihood that a person will develop a negative body image:

- Having people around you who experience negative body image
- Physical changes or acne during adolescence
- Experiencing changes in your appearance
- Having experienced negative comments or bullying
- Societal and cultural pressures to look a certain way

Negative body image can be a vicious cycle. Breaking that cycle is not easy but it is important. You can learn the importance of accepting yourself through:

- Recognizing your triggers
- Admitting that you have unhealthy appearance assumptions
- Utilizing new coping skills to manage your preoccupation with your appearance
- Reducing avoidance behaviors
- Talking to a professional if needed

Eating concerns often arise with body image issue but could also be separate. They may be connected with feeling very out of control and a need to control aspects of life. Restricting food intake can lead to bingeing or purging behaviors. When preoccupation with food becomes consuming, symptoms of an eating disorder may occur.

Eating disorder warning signs include but are not limited to:

- Significant alternations in weight
- Preoccupation with body image
- Disruptions in eating patterns
- Preoccupation with nutritional content
- Changes in exercise patterns
- Mood fluctuations
- Use of laxatives, diuretics, or diet pills

There are many things that you can do to manage concerns before they lead to the more serious symptoms listed above. Below are many self-help resources around creating positive a body image and a healthy relationship with food.

Websites

National Eating Disorder Association

Be Body Positive

Free Eating Concerns Workbook and Worksheets

Free Building Body Acceptance Workbook

Healthy at Every Size Community

National Alliance on Mental Illness: Eating Disorders

Videos/Podcasts

TED Talk: Amber Starks, “A New Standard of Beauty”

TED Talk: Troy Roness, “Unbroken: Mapping the Path to an Eating Disorder Recovery”

TED Talk: Laura Hill, “Eating Disorders from the Inside Out”

TED Talk: Meaghan Ramsey, “Why Thinking You Are Ugly Is Bad For You”

Podcast: The body image podcast

Podcast: Love, Food

Podcast: She’s All Fat: A Fat Positive Podcast

Podcast: ED Matters

Books

The Eating Disorder Sourcebook: A Comprehensive Guide to the Causes, Treatments, and Prevention of Eating Disorders, by Carolyn Costin

A Hunger So Wide and So Deep: A Multiracial View of Women’s Eating Problems, by Becky Thompson

Body Respect: What Conventional Health Books Get Wrong, Leave Out, and Just Plain Fail to Understand About Weight, by Linda Bacon

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You Are Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are, by Brene Brown