

# Boosting Your Body Image



When was the last time you heard an infant say she couldn't come out to play because she was having a bad hair day? How many toddlers do you know who'll refuse an ice-cream cone because they want to squeeze into their "skinny jeans"? We are not born with a body image. The way we feel about how we look is learned and influenced by family, friends and the media. It is also influenced—positively or negatively—by our race, our gender and the culture in which we are raised.

Do you worry that your body image is down in the dumps? Do you wonder *why* it matters if your body image is negative or positive? Learn more about body image and how you can boost it with the following information from Lisa Druxman, MA, a group exercise instructor and personal trainer who is creator of Stroller Strides, LLC, and has a master's degree in psychology with an emphasis on exercise adherence and weight control.

**1 Why a Negative Body Image Can Hurt You.** Body image is the conception or picture you have of your own body. Unfortunately, research has shown that negative body image can harm kids, adolescents, men, pregnant or postpartum women and women of all ethnicities. There is clear evidence that negative body image is linked to serious health

and emotional problems. People with poor body image are more likely to experience depression, disordered eating and anxiety disorders. They are also more likely to go to unhealthy lengths to change or alter their bodies and appearance. Not sure whether your body image is positive? Read the signs in the "Poor Versus Positive Body Image" box.

**2 Work Toward a Positive Body Image.** If you find yourself feeling bad about your body, try these strategies:

- Care for and value your body at all times.
- Dress in a way that makes you feel good right now.
- Find a physical activity that is pleasant and sustainable; accomplishing something physical will boost your self-esteem.

- Learn to trust your body.
- Look in the mirror without judging yourself; view yourself as a whole person instead of compartmentalizing your body.
- Set your goals in terms of achieving physical health and emotional well-being rather than obsessing about your physical appearance.

**3 Change Your Negative Thinking.** If you have a hard time with the strategies mentioned above, do one or both of the following activities:

- **Magazine Montage.** Gather a variety of magazines. Create two different collages of ads, one showing healthy images and the other showing negative, unrealistic images. Use colored markers to draw silly images on the negative collage. This exercise helps you identify how few healthy ideals appear in the mainstream press and allows you to "cross out" the negative images from your reality.
- **Celebrating Self.** This exercise focuses on recognizing and celebrating your positive qualities. Do the exercise with a friend or loved one. Ask the other person to write down what he or she thinks are your positive attributes and then do the same for him or her. ■

## Poor Versus Positive Body Image

Is your body image negative or healthy? Check the signs below.

**Negative** body image is:

- having a distorted perception of your shape
- believing that only other people are attractive
- being ashamed, self-conscious and anxious about your body
- feeling uncomfortable and awkward in your body

**Positive** body image is:

- having a true perception of your shape
- celebrating and appreciating your natural body shape
- understanding that a person's physical appearance says very little about his or her character and value as a person
- being proud and accepting of your unique body
- refusing to spend an unreasonable amount of time worrying about food, weight and calories
- feeling comfortable and confident in your body

Source: National Eating Disorders Association

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