

BODY IMAGE CHALLENGES

Body Image is the picture in your mind's eye of *how you see yourself*. It also includes your perception of how you believe others see you, and how you experience living in your own body.

A negative body image is:

- A distorted perception of your shape; you perceive parts of your body unlike what 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

A positive body image is:

- A clear, true perception of your shape. You see the various parts of your body as they really are.
- You celebrate and appreciate your natural body shape and you understand that a person's physical appearance says very little about their character and value as a person.
- You feel proud and accepting of your unique body and refuse to spend an unreasonable amount of time worrying about food, weight, and calories.
- You feel comfortable and confident in your body.

CHALLENGES FOR IMPROVING YOUR BODY IMAGE:

1. Accept that bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Focus less on the appearance of others. Focus on the things like their humor, intelligence and warmth, not their physical attributes. In doing so, you may become less obsessed with your own looks.
2. We all have days when we feel awkward or uncomfortable in our bodies, but the key to developing a positive body image is to recognize and respect our natural shape and learn to overpower those negative thoughts and feelings with positive, affirming and accepting ones. Refuse to call yourself names or make negative comments about your body to yourself or to others.
3. Explore all the things you have to offer to others: caring, friendship, fun, love, etc. List 5-10 good qualities that you have, such as understanding, intelligence, sense of humor, creativity, etc. Repeat these to yourself whenever you start to feel badly about your body.
4. Explore your internal self – emotionally, spiritually, and as a growing, changing human being. Without a sense of connection to something deeper, we are doomed to struggle for things to

fill us up – the GPA, the relationship, the looks, the body....which leaves us without a sense of real significance. Don't let your body become who you are.

5. Cultivate a variety of interests. Take up a new hobby or sport. Socialize more. Working on your talents, achievements and friendships positively redirects you toward developing competencies and increasing support for yourself.
6. Surround yourself with people and things that make you feel good about yourself and your abilities. When you are around people and things that support you and make you feel good, you will be less likely to base your self-esteem on the way your body looks.
7. Don't avoid participating in activities that you enjoy because you are self-conscious about the way your body looks. You have the right to enjoy any activity regardless of your body shape or size.
8. Treat your body with respect and kindness. Feed it, keep it active, and listen to its needs. Remember that your body is the vehicle that will carry you to your dreams.
9. Exercise for the joy of feeling your body move and grow stronger, rather than simply to lose weight or make up for calories you have eaten.
10. Resist the pressure to judge yourself and others based on weight, shape, or size. Become aware of your own weight prejudice and explore how that may interfere with self-esteem. Especially do not engage in name-calling or negative comments about others. Be aware that any such talk is a reflection of your own need to feel better about yourself at someone else's expense, and is a manifestation of weight prejudice.
11. Remember that we can be our worst critics and that others may really find us attractive. Allow for the possibility.
12. Don't forget that you are not alone in our pursuit of self-acceptance. It is a lifelong process that most people struggle with.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Freedman, Rita. (2002). *Bodylove: learning to like our looks and ourselves.*

Freedman, Rita . (1986). *Beauty bound: why we pursue the myth in the mirror.*

Wachter, Andrea, and Marcus, Marsea. (1999). *The don't diet, live-it! Workbook: healing food, weight and body issues.*

Normandi, Carol Emery, and Roark, Lauralee. (1998). *It's not about food: end your obsession with food and weight.*

Weiner, Jessica. (2006). *Do I look fat in this?*

Cash, Thomas. (1997). *Body image workbook: and 8-step program to learning to like your looks.*
Hutchinson, Marcia. (1985). *Transforming body image: learning to love the body you have.*
Sanford, Linda, and Donovan, Mary-Ellen. (1984) *Women and self-esteem.*
Kausman, Rick. (2004). *If not dieting, then what?*
Zerbe, Kathryn. (1993). *The body betrayed.*