

BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Body image is the dynamic perception of one's body – how it looks, feels, and moves. It is shaped by perception, emotions, physical sensations, and is not static, but can change in relation to mood, physical experience, and environment.

Body image is influenced strongly by self-esteem and self-evaluation, more so than by external evaluation by others. It can, however, be powerfully influenced and affected by cultural messages and societal standards of appearance and attractiveness. Given the overwhelming¹ prevalence of thin female images and strong and lean² male images common to all westernised societies, body image concerns³ have become widespread among adolescents.

A report by the American Association of University Women indicated that for girls, “the way I look” is the most important indicator of self-esteem, while for boys, self-worth is based on abilities, rather than look.

Going through puberty can amplify body image concerns. Puberty for boys brings characteristics typically admired by society – height, broadness, and strength. On the other hand, girls generally get rounder and have increased body fat during puberty, and these changes may further enhance⁴ dissatisfaction among girls.

From childhood to adulthood, television, billboards,⁵ movies, music videos, video games, computer games, toys, the Internet, and magazines convey images of ideal attractiveness, beauty, shape, size, strength, and weight.

Magazines targeted at female teenagers are full of images of young, slim, attractive, blemish-free⁶ females with small waists, large chests, and only ever-so-slightly-rounded hips, while magazines produced for males are full of strong, lean, attractive, blemish-free males, frequently surrounded by beautiful young women. Parental over-concern with children being thin or encouragement to avoid being fat can influence young people to become constant dieters and use unhealthy weight control methods. Health professionals should work with parents to help them encourage their children to be healthy in a manner that supports healthy body image development.



GLOSSARY

- 1 very large
- 2 slim
- 3 worries
- 4 increase
- 5 large signs used for advertising
- 6 perfect
- 7 impartial



Poor body image often leads to dieting, which can lead to unhealthy weight control behaviours, disordered eating, and ultimately eating disorders. Beginning at a young age, youths need to understand that bodies come in many different sizes and shapes. The message that everyone is different, and that different shapes and sizes are normal, should be clear and unbiased.⁷ Youths need to understand the physical and emotional changes that they will experience in puberty and be reassured their development is normal. To cultivate a healthy body image, they need to develop skills to help them navigate through all the messages they hear and see related to body image, appearance, and eating.

(Adapted from *Guidelines for Adolescent Nutrition Services*)

READING COMPREHENSION

ACTIVITIES



● Answer the following questions.

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| ① What is body image? | ④ Why can puberty be a critical period for girls? |
| ② Which aspects contribute to the shaping of one's body image? | ⑤ Which values are generally associated to male puberty? |
| ③ What is girls' self-esteem mostly based on? And boys' self-esteem? | ⑥ How can parents help their children to improve their body image? |

SYNONYMS

● Read the text again and find synonyms for the following words.

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| ① Feelings | | ⑤ Unhappiness | |
| ② Unchanging | | ⑥ Beauty | |
| ③ Common | | ⑦ Harmful | |
| ④ Teenagers | | ⑧ Look | |

