

LOVE adolescence YOUR SELF FEEL

Many teens and young adults (girls AND boys) don't feel good about their appearance. Some of them don't even realize they have negative thoughts about their body or how they look. If this is you, it may help to know you are not alone.

- More than half of adolescent girls feel negatively about their body shape or size.
- More than one-third of males think they are too short or don't weigh enough.
- Seven in 10 girls believe that they are not good enough or don't measure up in some way: looks, performance in school and relationships with others.

Body Image

Body image is your perception of your own body. How is YOUR body image? Do you generally feel good about yourself and accept your body, or do find yourself saying things like this?

- I am too tall/short
- I am too fat/skinny
- My skin is too fair/dark/freckled
- My hair is too curly/straight/thin
- If only _____ I'd be happy

Unfortunately, many of us don't have a very realistic view of our physical appearance. We think we are too big when we are actually at a very healthy weight, for example. Poor body image can lead to low self-esteem and limit your ability to be successful. It's also associated with depression, anxiety and dangerous eating disorders.

Influences on body image

It's easy to understand how we develop a distorted body image. We're bombarded daily with glamorous photos of models and celebrities. Most of these images have been altered electronically to make the person look a certain way and to conform to an unrealistic ideal of the perfect man or woman. Here are just two examples.

Even toys reinforce an imaginary—but idealistic—human body. If the Barbie doll were a real woman, she'd be 7 feet two inches tall, with a 40-inch chest and 22-inch waist! Ken would be 7 feet 8 inches tall, with a 50-inch chest and a 43-inch waistline. That doesn't sound very realistic, does it?



Tips for developing a healthy body image

- Recognize that everyone develops at his or her own pace. Don't compare yourself to your friends. If you think you need to lose or gain weight, for example, get feedback from an objective source, such as your doctor.
- Focus on what is strong and healthy and *right* with your body. Do you play a sport or an instrument? Think about all the ways your wonderful body makes that possible (a strong heart for running fast or long fingers to reach far-apart piano keys).
- Stop the negative self-talk (see the sample list above!). You wouldn't say those things to your best friend, right? Replace negative comments with positive ones. It might feel awkward at first, but if you keep at it, you'll get used to making kind remarks to yourself.
- Surround yourself with positive people—in person and online—who make you feel good about yourself. Join Facebook groups and online forums that reinforce healthy body image and self-esteem (there are lots of them!).
- Learn to take good care of yourself. Eat healthy and get enough sleep. Make sure you exercise; it releases feel-good hormones (endorphins) and will help you have a fit and healthy body.
- Be aware of when the media distorts how models and celebrities really look, like the examples above.
- Keep a journal. Write answers to questions such as:
 - ▶ I like to...
 - ▶ I am good at...
 - ▶ I am proud of myself because...
 - ▶ I would like to learn how to...
- If you feel depressed or anxious about your body or appearance, talk to your parents, your doctor or a trusted adult.

Check out the following online resources (most have a Facebook pages too) for more information on developing a healthy body image.

- Bi3d.tridelta.org
- NationalEatingDisorders.org
- OurBodiesOurSelves.org
- Teenshealth.org/teen
- TheBodyPositive.org
- GirlsHealth.gov
- Proud2bme.org

Components of Healthy Eating

Healthy eating is...

- **Eating when hungry and eating until satisfied, not stuffed.**
- **Eating a wide variety of foods.**
- **Eating three meals a day, plus one or more snacks; not skipping meals and then eating a huge meal or snack later.**
- **Eating from all the food groups to ensure adequate nutrients.**
- **Not being afraid to eat foods that have fat in them or add fat to foods when appropriate (e.g. peanut butter on toast, butter on bread, cream cheese on bagels).**
- **Not needing to count calories or fat grams.**
- **Not eating just because of boredom, sadness, loneliness, joy or other emotions.**
- **Not being “on a diet.”**

For more information, call our FindLine at 731-644-3463 or go online at www.hcmc-tn.org.

