What Is Body Image?

Your body image is how you perceive or see your physical appearance. It can be positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

Body Image and Society

Cultural socialization, interpersonal characteristics, physical characteristics, and personality all impact the way we think about our bodies. The media often reinforces arbitrary and unattainable social standards of beauty by portraying how our bodies *should* look, and we are likely to experience self-consciousness as we compare ourselves to images we see on television and billboards, in magazines, etc. Society's obsession with physical appearance also pits us against peers and creates pressure to meet certain beauty standards as social groups and organizations place an increasingly high value on what we look like.

Additional Resources

Books:
Wanting to be Her
By Michelle Graham

So Long Insecurity
By Beth Moore

Christian Paths to Health and Wellness
By Peter Walters and John Byl

Related Scriptures

Inner Beauty
1 Peter 3:3-4

God's Eyes on Your Heart
1 Samuel 16:7

Where to Fix Your Eyes
2 Corinthians 4:18

How You Were Made
Psalm 139:14

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Body Image

A Quick Reference Guide

Provided by the Office of Student Life

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Positive Body Image

If you are happy and satisfied with your physical appearance, including your size, shape, muscularity, and/or weight, you likely have a positive body image. Studies have shown that friend and family support, along with low levels of pressure to attain an *ideal* body shape, help to foster a positive body image. Developing a sense of self-worth that is not solely based on appearance and building resilience to social pressures on physical appearance are important, too. Shifting your thoughts to health, wellness, compassion, and gratitude instead of criticism, social comparison, and extreme measures to meet unattainable social ideals can also be helpful.

Negative Body Image

Negative evaluations of your body size, shape, muscularity, and/or weight often lead to a negative body image and result from comparing your body to a supposed *ideal* body. The more you hold social standards as the ideal, the more likely you are to compare yourself to unattainable paradigms and be pressured to look thin or athletic, or to wear certain types of trendy clothing. There is a correlation between negative body image and a person's internal critical or self-loathing thoughts, which means a struggle with body image is usually associated with an internal battle that negatively affects a person's sense of confidence, self-efficacy, and self-worth.

The more stressed a person is, the more vulnerable they are to negative thoughts about themselves.

How to Improve Your Body Image

- Changing your thinking should be purposeful. Take time each day to focus on what you are grateful for with your appearance, and start to shift your focus from criticism to gratitude.
- Take note of your internal messages. Memorize Scripture (see Related Scripture) to begin replacing negative messages with the truth—that God created you and loves you as you are.
- Reject unrealistic ideals.
- Give yourself a break from magazines and other mass media.
- Overall health and well-being are key components for maintaining a healthy body image and vice versa.
- Practice empathy and non-judgment toward yourself and others.
- Find a friend, pastor, RA, or someone you trust with whom you can talk. The staff in Counseling Services, Student Life, Campus Ministries, and Residence Life are available to listen as well.

How to Help a Friend Improve His/Her Body Image

- Encourage your friend to seek the help of a pastor, Christian counselor, or psychologist to help work through the sources of a negative body image.
- Offer to pray *with* your friend in addition to praying *for* your friend.
- Be available to spend time and listen. Simply being present conveys a message of value and worth.
- If you are unsure of how to approach your friend, talk to your RA or someone you trust to help.
- If you are concerned and think your friend may need help beyond what you can offer, contact the Offices of Student Life, Counseling Services, Campus Ministries, or Residence Life.

On- and Off-Campus Support

On Campus

Office of Student Life: available to talk and pray with you as well as suggest options for further care (BC252; ext. 6300)

Counseling Services: offers free support (Townhouse H1; ext. 8540)

Office of Campus Ministries: provides spiritual support and mentoring (HC325; ext. 6372)

Health Services: provides medical assistance and referrals for information and care (Townhouse H1; ext. 6215)

Off Campus

Arden Woods Psychological Services (New Brighton): 651.482.9361

Midwest Center for Trauma and Emotional Healing (Minnetonka): 952.934.2555

Minnesota Renewal Center (Arden Hills): 651.486.4828