

WWDA youth network

Fact Sheet
Body Image

June 2015



Body Dissatisfaction

What is body dissatisfaction?

When a person has negative thoughts and feelings about their own body, body dissatisfaction can develop. Body dissatisfaction occurs internally, in our mind, but can be influenced by several external factors. These factors include family, friends, classmates, and the media



What factors make people more likely to have body dissatisfaction?

Age– during your teenage years, your body image is being shaped. At this age you are more likely to focus on your body image. This is mainly because your body is changing quickly and you are more vulnerable to peer pressure.

Gender– Adolescent girls are more prone to body dissatisfaction than adolescent boys.

Low self-esteem and/or depression– Constant self-criticism and having negative feelings about yourself can lead to persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger, shame, guilt and body dissatisfaction.

Teasing and bullying – people who are teased or bullied about appearance or weight have an increased risk of becoming dissatisfied with their body.

Personality traits – we all have lots of different personality traits. Some traits, like people with perfectionist tendencies and high achievers, are at higher risk.

Friends and family who diet and express body image concerns – if the role models in our lives are constantly concerned with weight loss and dieting, it can increase our risk of developing a negative body image, regardless of our body type.

Body Size– People with larger body sizes have an increased risk of body dissatisfaction because of society pressure.

Eating Disorders

What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder is characterised by obsessive thoughts about food and body weight. The three most common eating disorders are:

- *Anorexia Nervosa* — is characterized by an abnormally low body weight, an intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted perception of weight. People with anorexia often focus on controlling their weight and food intake, using extreme efforts that tend to significantly interfere with their lives.
- *Bulimia* – characterized by a distorted body image and an obsessive desire to lose or control weight, in which bouts of extreme overeating are followed by fasting or self-induced vomiting or purging.
- *Compulsive Overeating or Binge Eating* – is characterised by recurrent episodes of binge eating, which include BOTH of the following:
 - “Eating, in a specific period of time an amount of food that is definitely larger than what most people would eat in a similar period of time under similar circumstances.
 - A sense of lack of control overeating during the episode



What are the symptoms of an eating disorder?

Obsessive thoughts about food and body weight can change eating patterns, mood, daily activities, and appearance. This may include

dieting, making excuses not to eat, avoidance of social situations, feeling depressed or anxious, and gaining or losing weight.

What causes an eating disorder?

There is no single cause for eating disorders. It is thought that a number of factors are involved to varying degrees in different people, including: genetic inheritance, personal and psychological factors related to adolescence or family issues for example, and social factors such as media representation of body image.

Positive Body Image

Why is a positive body image important?

Positive body image occurs when a person is able to accept, appreciate and respect their body.

Positive body image is important because it is one of the protective factors that can make a person more resilient to eating disorders. Having a positive image will improve your self-esteem, self-acceptance, and provide you with a healthy outlook.



Be happy with you!

How can you improve your body image?

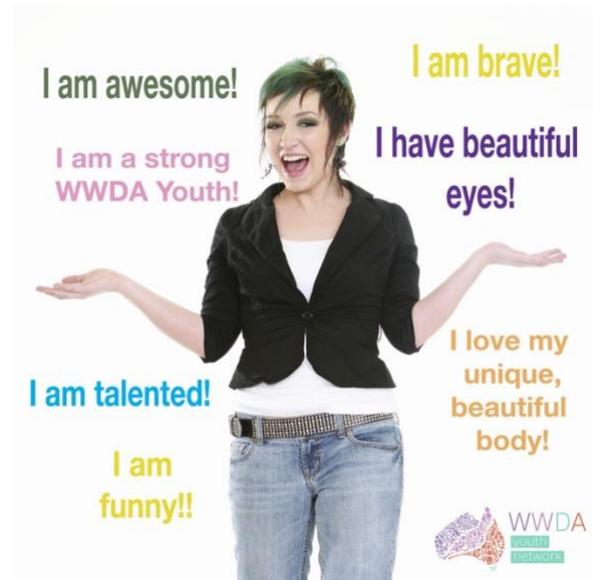
While some aspects of your appearance can be changed, others, like your height, muscle composition and bone structure are genetically fixed. It is important to understand that there is no right or wrong when it comes to weight, shape, size and appearance. Challenging beauty ideals and learning to accept your body and its natural shape is a crucial step towards positive body image.

Sometimes, young women with a disability feel frustrated or ashamed with their body. They can sometimes feel like their body has failed them. Focusing on thoughts like these can lead you into a negative

spiral. Trying to focus on all the positive things you and your body have to offer is really helpful.

Other helpful hints include:

- Focus on your positive qualities, skills and talents.
- Say positive things to yourself every day. For example "I am strong. I am smart. I have a lovely smile."
- Avoid negative or harsh self-talk. Don't put yourself down.
- Focus on appreciating and respecting what your body can do. This will help you feel more positive about it.
- Set positive, health focused goals rather than weight loss goals.
- Appreciate your own beauty, and try not to compare yourself with others. Accept yourself as a whole. Remember that everyone is unique, everyone has good and bad qualities, and everyone has differences that make us special.
- Remember that many images in the media are not realistic.



Getting help

If you feel dissatisfied with your body or are developing unhealthy eating or exercise habits seek professional help. It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have. Some counsellors and psychologists have specialised knowledge in body image and eating disorders. Professional support can help guide you to change negative beliefs and behaviours.

Lifeline

If this post has brought up any issues for you, or if you just feel like you need to speak to someone, you can call **Lifeline** on **13 11 14** or **chat to someone online**.

ButterFly Foundation

If you are affected by an Eating Disorder, you can contact the **ButterFly Foundation** for counselling, support and referral.

Call **1800 33 4673** or **chat to someone online**.

References:

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC), *NEDC Fact Sheet – Body Image*, 2015.

SANE Australia, *Eating Disorders*, SANE Factsheet 19, 2014