

How Do You Want to Look?

Close your eyes.

Imagine you could look any way you'd like.

What do you see?

Does your image resemble how you really look?

If the answer is no, you're not alone.

Lots of women and men are dissatisfied with how they look. One study found that 90% of women and 82% of men wished their bodies were different.

Do any of these things sound familiar?

- On-again, off-again diets.
- Exercising or working out way too much.
- Depriving yourself of foods you enjoy.
- Taking vitamin or herbal supplements in spite of possible health risks.
- Feeling ashamed or embarrassed about your body.
- Putting off life goals because your body doesn't match your ideal.

What's Wrong with Wanting to Look Good?

It's natural to want to feel attractive and have other people see you as attractive. The media and fashion industry use that to promote unrealistic, thin-is-beautiful, buffed-is-better images that can harm your health.

A negative body attitude can cause you to:

- **Lose perspective.** Constant focus on how you look takes attention away from other important parts of your life, such as studies, friends and interests. You can lose sight of things that make you unique and special!
- **Lose confidence.** Constantly striving for something that's not possible affects how you feel about your ability to succeed at anything—studies, work, relationships, etc.
- **Get sick.** Your body needs a minimum daily allowance of certain nutrients to be at its best. Ignoring these needs lowers your resistance to germs and illness.
- **Hurt yourself.** Too much exercise and/or taking supplements to bulk up fast can lead to physical problems and injuries. These can be immediate. Or they can be long-term medical conditions such as osteoporosis or infertility.

If you've been struggling to change your body and aren't satisfied with the results, you might want to try something different. You might try changing your body attitude.

What's Your Image IQ?

Do you ever have any of these feelings about your body?

- I'm 10–15 pounds heavier than I'd like to be.
- Sometimes I wonder if I spend too much time exercising and working out.
- When someone asks me if I've lost weight, I feel pleased and proud.
- I like my body best when I'm bulked up.
- I think of food in terms of calories rather than what nutrients my body needs.
- When I look in the mirror, I can only see the parts of my body I don't like.
- I'd use a "quick-fix" diet to lose weight for a special event.
- The thinner I am, the more confident I am.

Instead of wanting a body that's impossible to get without unhealthy eating or activity levels, what if you aimed for a healthy body?

What if You Felt Good About Your Body Just the Way It Is?

If you're unhappy with the way you look, imagine feeling like this instead.

- I like some parts of my body more than others, but overall I'm pleased with the way it all goes together.
- There are qualities I like about myself, like having a sense of humor or being trustworthy, that don't have anything to do with the way I look.
- I have my own style. I have fun choosing clothing or hairstyles that make me feel attractive.
- I enjoy the way my body feels when I move it—when I'm stretching, walking, dancing and playing sports.
- I know attractive people whose bodies don't fit the "ideal."
- I notice signals from my body and respond to them. I rest when I'm tired. I choose comfortable clothing and shoes. I eat when I'm hungry and stop when I'm satisfied.

It's really possible to drop a negative body image and find this kind of confidence in yourself without changing your body.

You Can Change Your Mind

Here are some ways to start turning your feelings around:

- **Acknowledge outside pressures.** Friends, family and others may have bought into commercial and pop culture images. Ads try to sell things by taking advantage of your negative body attitude.
- **Notice when you feel bad about your body.** If you have negative thoughts about your body, the first step is to notice it. Then you can take steps to change to a positive body image.
- **Accept your natural size.** If you follow sensible, moderate eating and activity habits, your body will naturally settle at a healthy weight for you.
- **Allow time for change.** Body attitudes are powerful and deep. Start by appreciating one thing about your body every day. Work up to liking as many things about your body as you started out disliking.
- **Use different measures.** Don't rate yourself by the scale, or by what size you wear. Instead, think about how healthy you can make your body, how good you feel and how much your body can do for you.
- **Get help.** Ask a health care provider or counselor for help if you need it.

Trading your old negative image for a new positive one is easier when you have a new attitude in place.

You Can Change Your Actions

Set a goal to improve your health, energy, appearance and mood instead of trying to achieve a body that's a certain size or shape.

- **Find foods that help you look and feel good.** Add one or two at a time to your diet.
- **Walk, bike, swim, dance** or do something else you like to do for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.
- **Ask friends to join you.** As a group, come up with delicious and nutritious eating ideas. Support each other's goals for regular physical activity.
- **Spend time appreciating your body.** What features do you like? What does your body do for you? What feels really great to your body? Focus on these positive aspects for 10 minutes every day.
- **Think of yourself as a whole person.** Your body is only one part. Your friendliness, your intelligence and your feelings are all attributes that make you attractive.

Changing your body attitude can have great rewards.

Eating Disorders

These conditions can grow out of a negative body image:

Anorexia. Difficulty with taking in enough calories to maintain a healthy weight.

Binge eating disorder. Eating large amounts of food in a short period of time.

Bulimia. Eating large amounts of food in a short period of time, then trying to get rid of the food by throwing up, using laxatives or diuretics, dieting or exercising very hard.

Female Athlete Triad. A combination of three medical conditions: disordered eating, lack of menstrual periods (amenorrhea) and bone weakening (osteoporosis).

Muscle dysmorphia. Seeing your body as puny and thin despite being very muscular. Spending hours a day working out and taking supplements or other drugs to enhance muscle development. Sometimes called "reversed anorexia."

This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care.

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Body Image Attitudes & Actions

