

Developing a positive body image

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When it comes to body image, we often think of the media as having a big impact on how and what we think about our bodies. However, there are many factors that can influence a person's body image. So what can you do to foster a positive body image? Let's delve into what body image is, how it manifests in your day-to-day life and how you can promote positive body image in yourself, your peers and society.

What is body image?

Body image is the way you see your physical body and how you imagine it looks to others. People with positive body image generally feel comfortable and confident in their bodies, while people with [negative body image](#) may struggle to accept their natural size and shape and feel ashamed, anxious or awkward about their bodies.

Body image doesn't always align with reality, which means you may view your body in a distorted and inaccurate way.

What influences body image?

Many things influence your perception of your body, including family, friends, peers, your culture and the media.

Families often exert a lot of influence on body image and can do so from an early age. For example, the way a parent or family member talks about their own body, or the bodies of others, can be internalized and reflected in a child's own body image down the road.

Coming to college can be a culture shock, especially in an active town like Boulder. Feeling like you don't fit in can feel very isolating. For many, college is also the first time you're surrounded only by peers, making it easier to compare academic and social performance, [body size](#) and shape and eating and exercise habits.

It's natural to compare yourself to others, but, if you're doing it too frequently or using unrealistic standards as the basis of comparison, self-esteem and [body image](#) can suffer.

How do you develop a positive body image?

Being aware of the media's influence, and the messages that permeate our culture regarding how we should look, is a good place to start. By paying attention to these messages, you can think critically about what you're being taught, not only about weight but also race, class, gender and sexual orientation.

Once you're aware of these messages, you can come to understand how they impact self-evaluation and consciously choose to reject them.

Being critical of your use of social media is also important. It's common for people to post highlights or idealized versions of their lives, which don't necessarily reflect their day-to-day reality. Taking regular breaks from [social media](#) to spend time with like-minded friends can provide community and support around common values and can ground us in reality.

Incorporating activities such as meditation, yoga and breathing exercises are great ways to practice self-care and increase feelings of wellbeing.

6 things you can do right now

- Keep a top-10 list of things you like about yourself, unrelated to your appearance. Read and add to it often.
- See yourself as a whole person instead of the sum of your body parts.
- Appreciate all your body can do for you, such as breathing and laughing.
- Surround yourself with positive people. It's easier to feel good around those who like you as you are.
- Instead of reflecting inward and worrying about your [body](#), turn your energy outward to help others.
- Try to replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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