



## Tips to Improve Body Image

*Briana Steele, MA, LPC, NCC & Whitney Robenolt, PsyD*

*Updated by Jill Adaman, PhD*

Why are so many of us struggling with body image these days? For people of any gender, it's hard not to compare our own bodies with what we see on social media, TV, and in movies. Body image (the perceptions we hold about our physical appearance) contributes to our sense of confidence, self-esteem, and overall mental health. It can affect our decisions about whether and how we eat, exercise, socialize, or participate in activities that are important to us. Body image is influenced by many factors including culture, family, social environment and personal experiences. However, we also have some control over how we feel about our bodies. Here are some ways to develop and maintain a positive body image.

- **Recognize that bodies come in all shapes and sizes:** Just as some people have blue eyes and others have brown eyes, people's body shapes vary as well. Learn to see the beauty in every type of body, including your own. Comparing our appearance to others makes us feel bad about ourselves because we're comparing what we *admire* about others' appearance to what we *don't like* about our own appearance. It's not fair to ourselves.
- **Get smart about media images:** The bodies we see in the media are often unrealistically thin (if they're women) or unrealistically muscular (if they're men). Many of the images we see are digitally enhanced. It's simply not possible for most people to look this way. The advertising industry, in particular, cultivates insecurity so people will buy their products. If your body or face doesn't look like the unrealistically perfect model in the ad, they hope you'll buy their product to help you "improve" your appearance. Don't fall for it.
- **Learn to appreciate what your body does for you:** Remind yourself that your body carries you throughout your day and enables you to spend your time and energy doing things that are important to you. Let yourself notice and appreciate the good feelings your body brings you when you use it to engage in sports, relaxation, spending time in nature, or any other physical activity you enjoy.
- **Practice self-compassion and self-care:** Recognize your body's needs and take care of them as best you can by eating nutritious foods, exercising in a way that is fun for you, and prioritizing sleep. Find time for activities you enjoy. Forgive yourself when you make mistakes in your self-care and get back on track as soon as you can.

- **Build a body-positive support network:** Surround yourself with people who accept and appreciate all bodies. Let other people know that it's not ok for them to comment on your body. Change the subject when other people are talking about their bodies in a negative way. Focus on relationships that support your body image goals.

*Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.*