

Body Image



Women in our society often spend a lot of time worrying about their bodies and their appearance, and comparing themselves to images portrayed in magazines, on TV and in the movies.

These images are not real life. Women in these pictures are often younger than us – sometimes just 11 or 12 years old, but made up to look older. They are usually much thinner than us, and often under a healthy weight. And they have ‘perfect’ faces, achieved through cosmetic surgery and ‘airbrushing’ the photos.

Comparing ourselves to these unreal and unhealthy images can make us feel bad about ourselves and our bodies, resulting in a negative body image.

Body image means the relationship we have with our own body. How do you feel about your body? What do you like best about it? What can you do with your body?

The beauty myth

- The “ideal” woman – portrayed by models, Barbie dolls, and screen actresses – is 5’7”, weighs 45 kilos, and wears a size 8.
- Screen goddess Marilyn Monroe, unlike the skinny models of today, was a much healthier size 14.
- All images used on magazine covers are ‘airbrushed’ to reduce the appearance of weight or ageing.
- The diet industry (diet foods, diet programs, diet drugs, etc) makes over \$40 billion each year, and is still growing.
- Quick-weight-loss schemes are among the most common consumer frauds, and diet programs have the highest customer dissatisfaction of any service industry.



What is attractive?

People are complex. What we are attracted to is always about so much more than just the way a person looks. It might be a warm smile, a kind gesture, or someone who listens to us. In the midst of all the media images of the so-called 'perfect' body, it is easy to lose sight of this. Everyone has a different idea of what is beautiful. Especially when you care for someone, you can often see the beautiful things about them.

In the same way, as we care for ourselves and our bodies, we can rediscover and appreciate our own beauty.

Enhancing a positive body image

- Improve your own body image and your friends' by showing your friends that you accept and appreciate their appearance.
- Nurture your body. Think about eating healthy, yummy foods as a positive way of treating yourself rather than a punishing diet.
- Listen to what your body needs, for example by looking after yourself if you are tired or sick.
- Enjoy caring for your body. Put aside an evening to give yourself a foot massage, paint your nails, have a relaxing bath or listen to music.



- Create opportunities to experience your body as a wonderful creation (walking, dancing, swimming, dressing up).
- Be critical of the media images that you see, understanding that they are designed to sell an idea or product, and don't reflect the realities of everyday life.
- Remember that no body is perfect and nobody is perfect.
- Keep body image and appearance in perspective - who you are is about so much more than what you look like. It's also about what you do, and who you are inside.
- Think about other things you can do that enable you to appreciate and celebrate your body.

For more information

Ring the Power On Team at Women's Health West on 9689 9588 or online at www.whwest.org.au