



A person's body image refers to how they perceive their own body. This often relates to how we think other people see and value our bodies. Sometimes, the way we view our bodies can have a negative impact on our health and wellbeing. This guide aims to get you thinking about your relationship with your body, and what you can do if things start to go wrong.

## **Media and body image**

Often, how a person sees themselves is heavily influenced by the media. Most TV, film and social media we consume feature white, slim, cisgender and able-bodied men and women, encouraging us to see this type of body as an aspirational standard.

The pressure to look a certain way can lead people to spend lots of time editing and designing to make themselves fit such ideals. A 2017 UK survey by the Be Real campaign and YMCA found that between 50 and 70 percent of young people worried about looking 'perfect' in the pictures that they put online. It also found that the pressure to have the ideal body impacted upon the mental health and wellbeing of young people from all different places and backgrounds.

Some body activists have begun to use social media instead as a space to spread positive ideas about body image - check out some of the body-positive instagram accounts we have later in this guide! The general body positivity movement can be traced back to the fat acceptance movement of the late 1960s, but the more recent shift online has evolved to encompass not just challenging unrealistic feminine beauty standards surrounding weight and size, but also the embrace and acceptance of all types of bodies.

## **Body image self-care**

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Unfollowing or muting social media of accounts that post unrealistic images can make a big difference. If you notice that an account you follow doesn't make you feel good, take a break from it and see if that helps. Some people also find it helpful to do a complete social media 'detox' where they suspend or delete their accounts for a period of time.

## *Surround yourself with images of all types of bodies*

There are more and more movies and TV series representing a range of body types, body-positive social media accounts, and brands that use all kinds of bodies in their marketing. It's still a minority of the images out there, but if you seek them out you can build a more diverse world of media for yourself.

## *Work towards body neutrality*

Body neutrality means trying to detach your sense of worth and value from how you look. In society, our appearance can feel like the main thing about us, but really it's just a small part of who we are. Body neutrality encourages us to appreciate and celebrate all the other parts instead!

## *Engage with body-positivity campaigns*

There have been lots of body-positivity campaigns recently, from the #iweigh campaign on Instagram, where people describe their weight in terms of the important things in their life, to the 'Operation Beautiful' movement, which encourages people to post anonymous notes in public places for other people to find, such as 'you are beautiful just the way you are'.

## *It's normal not to feel great all the time*

Working towards feeling comfortable with your body is by no means easy. It's normal to find it hard, to find yourself having negative thoughts about yourself, or to compare yourself negatively to others. The important thing to remember is that body positivity is a continual process, and that there are places you can find support, advice and motivation.

## **If you need support...**

If you feel that you are frequently thinking about your body in a negative way, there are lots of places where you can talk about it, and seek emotional and medical support.

## *Some body-positive social media accounts*

- Eff Your Beauty Standards (@effyourbeautystandards)
- Kaguya (@p.s.kaguya)
- The Everyman Project (@theeverymanproject)

## *Some self-help books*

- *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love* by Sonya Renee Taylor
- *Body Respect* by Linda Bacon and Lucy Aphramor
- *Body Outlaws: Rewriting the Rules of Beauty and Body Image* by Ophira Edut and Rebecca Walker

## *Support groups*

There are lots of in-person and online support groups for people struggling with negative body image. You can usually join these for free, and membership is open to everyone. The links at the bottom of this guide are a good place to start.

## *Professional help*

Sometimes a negative body image can develop into a condition called Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). The Body Dysmorphic Disorder Foundation defines BDD as a 'disabling preoccupation with perceived defects or flaws in appearance. It can affect both men and women, and makes sufferers excessively self-conscious... Onlookers are frequently perplexed because they can see nothing out of the ordinary, but BDD causes devastating distress and interferes substantially with the ability to function socially.'

If you think you might have BDD, talk about it to someone you trust, for example your doctor. They will probably ask a number of questions about your symptoms and how they affect your life, after which they

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## Further resources and sources

[Be Real report](#) investigating the impact of body image anxiety on young people in the UK

[The Body and Soul Club](#), which aims to change the conversation around young male body image

The BDD Foundation-recommended [support groups](#)

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