

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is shown in profile, looking out a window. The scene is warmly lit, with soft light coming from the window. In the background, there are string lights with round, glowing bulbs, some of which are out of focus, creating a bokeh effect. The woman is wearing a dark-colored, ribbed top and a thin chain necklace. The overall mood is calm and contemplative.

The Complete Guide To
**POSITIVE
BODY IMAGE**

Look In the Mirror And
Love What You See

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Introduction

Do you like the reflection that you see when you look into the mirror? Or, do you tend to focus on the minor imperfections and flaws that you see? Maybe you find yourself disappointed when you notice your acne, your love handles, your smile, or even your brown eyes.

You might be struggling with negative body image.

Left untreated, negative body image can consume your entire life. It can cause you to obsess over your looks, lack self-esteem, develop unhealthy exercise and dietary habits, or invest in cosmetic surgery to improve your appearance.

The good news is that it's completely possible to improve your body image and your overall quality of life. One day, you'll be able to look in the mirror and love what you see. Until then, it's important to learn about body image and what you can do to improve it.

What is Body Image

Body image is somewhat of a complicated concept because it manifests itself in several different ways. According to the [Office on Women's Health](#), "body image" is how you see yourself when you look in the mirror or even think about your appearance during the day. In most cases, your perception of body image will depend on society's "ideal" characteristics.

Yet, your body image goes much further than how you feel about your weight or your body composition.



Your body image can be impacted by any of the following:

- Height
- Weight
- Eye color
- Facial structure and features
- Hair color, texture, and style
- Skin tone and color
- Physical disabilities or deformities
- Body composition (fat vs. muscle)
- Smile
- Body shape

Being insecure about any aspect of your physical appearance can result in an overall negative body image. On the other hand, being confident about the minor features of your body can lead to a positive body image.

Factors Impacting Body Image

Your specific body image will typically come from what you *think* you're supposed to look like. This is influenced by both internal and external factors.

Internal Factors

- How you feel about yourself
- Your ideas about the perfect body and features
- Your self-esteem

External Factors

- Social media
- Print media (magazines, newspapers, and advertising)
- Digital media (television shows, movies, and music videos)
- Pressure or bullying from family, friends, or peers
- Personality traits
- Health and fitness goals
- Significant others (boyfriends/girlfriends and husbands/wives)

Your body image can be caused by one of these factors *or* every single one.

Body Image Statistics

Though many people aren't vocal about their struggles with body image, that doesn't mean that issues with negative body image aren't common. To understand just how widespread and severe this issue is in today's society, take a look at these statistics.

- Nearly 88% of women and over 65% of men will compare themselves to images they see in the media ([FireHouse Experience](#)).
- Around 80% of 10-year-olds are afraid of gaining weight and being "fat" ([Parker Nicollet Melrose Center](#)).
- 1 in 2 teens are unhappy with their bodies and over 45% of teenagers have considered undergoing cosmetic surgery ([National Organization for Women](#)).
- The average woman in America is 5'4" and weighs 165 pounds while the average female model is 5'11" and 120 pounds ([The Body Image Therapy Center](#)).
- As many as 1 in 50 Americans have body dysmorphic disorder ([International OCD Foundation](#)).
- Over 30 million Americans have some form of an eating disorder, with anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating disorder being most common ([National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders](#)).

As you can tell by these statistics, negative body image doesn't only impact young women. In fact, negative body image won't discriminate based on your gender, sex, age, weight, nationality, religion, residence, body composition, or any other identifying characteristic.

Negative vs. Positive Body Image

What you see when you look in the mirror will have a major influence on your mental, physical, emotional, and social health. Unfortunately, whether you have a positive or negative body image will impact your confidence and satisfaction in your own appearance.

Negative Body Image

Research suggests that 9 in 10 women struggle to maintain a positive body image, with some data suggesting this number can be closer to 100%.

When you have a negative body image, you'll experience preoccupation with your physical appearance. It's not uncommon to spend an excessive amount of time in front of the mirror, on the scale, exercising at the gym, or preparing food to aid with weight loss.

You're willing to do whatever it takes to fix your flaws and achieve your own idea of "beauty."

Negative body image is often associated with an overwhelming amount of shame. You might find yourself avoiding social situations or intentionally wearing baggy clothing, as to not draw attention to your physical appearance or insecurities.



It's extremely common to compare your physical appearance to others and be embarrassed that you don't look like those you see in the media. You may even feel as if you're not worthy of love, success, happiness, or a new job.

When you're dissatisfied with your physical appearance and these negative thoughts become obsessive, you're at greater risk for developing several mental health conditions. That includes eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and body dysmorphic disorder.

Positive Body Image

Positive body image is significantly less common in today's society. When you have a positive body image, you're more confident in your appearance and less obsessed with any perceived flaws, blemishes, or less attractive parts of your body.

Yet, having a positive body image doesn't come along with having the "perfect" body.

This is simply a state where you feel satisfied or confident in your body, flaws, and all. You might not meet society's expectations for what's considered "beautiful," but that doesn't mean that you can't find yourself attractive.

In fact, your focus will be much less on accepting your body for the way it looks and more on seeing yourself as a complete person. Instead of putting your self-worth in your weight or how you look with makeup on, you see yourself for your personality, skills, and accomplishments. You know that gaining a few pounds or trying a new hairstyle won't make you less of a person.

Signs of a Positive Body Image

Positive body image is not the same thing as looking the way society expects you to look. Instead, here are a few signs that you have a positive body image.

- Confidence in your own appearance
- Wearing clothing that you feel most comfortable in
- Willingness to attend social gatherings
- Guilt-free actions (like eating a meal without counting calories)
- Not putting your self-worth in your weight or physique
- Doing things to improve your health rather than your appearance



Keep in mind that it takes time to shift your mindset to one that is more positive, so be patient.

Signs of a Poor Body Image

Since poor body image is much more common, then you might be exhibiting some of these signs without even knowing it. Here's a brief glimpse of what you might experience when you have a more negative body image.

- Hyper-critical focus on your flaws, blemishes, or imperfections
- Anxiety about attending social gatherings
- Wearing clothing that hides the areas of your body that you're insecure about
- Obsession with your weight and calorie counting
- Comparing your appearance to that of your peers or images in the media
- Feeling "less than" when you don't look perfect
- Inability to accept genuine compliments on your appearance
- Dangerous exercise or dietary habits intended to help with weight loss
- Desire to undergo cosmetic surgery to "fix" your flaws

Poor body image can be absolutely draining mentally and extremely dangerous physically.

The Connection Between Self-Worth & Body Image

There's a definite link between how you see yourself in the mirror and how much value you give yourself as a person. That can go one of two ways, with either extremely negative or extremely positive body image.

Here's what the differences might be.

There's a point at which positive body image turns into something a bit more sinister: Overconfidence. In this situation, you might think that you lack imperfections, that you're better looking than those around you, that you're more worthy of certain benefits based on your looks, and you may even openly mock the physical appearance of others.

Conversely, having a very negative body image might lead you to believe that you're not worthy of any positive things that might happen in your life. Since your self-worth is linked to your body image, you might feel as if you're undeserving of a healthy relationship, a family, friends, new opportunities, or even happiness.



If you truly have a healthy body image, you won't feel better or worse about yourself as a person when your physical appearance changes.

You know that gaining a few pounds won't make you less deserving of a new job opportunity while getting a new hairstyle doesn't make you more qualified to obtain a job offer.

The Serious Consequences of Severe Poor Body Image

Having a negative body image is bad enough when you feel shame or embarrassment every time you look at yourself in the mirror. Yet, negative body image could be taken one step further by taking extreme measures to achieve what you see as the “perfect” body. In fact, this might manifest itself in the form of mental illness.



Eating Disorders

There’s a good chance that your negative body image is linked to your body composition, your physique, and your weight. You may even be willing to do whatever it takes to lose the extra weight as fast as possible. That includes excessive dieting and exercise methods.

This often leads to the development of an eating disorder.

Here’s a look at different types of eating disorders that may eventually develop as a result of negative body image.

- **Anorexia Nervosa:** Instead of changing your diet to lose a *healthy* 1 or 2 pounds per week, you might be hyper-focused on cutting your calories or completely starving yourself. This can lead to excessive weight gain in a short period of time, which can put excess strain on just about every system in your body. The problem with anorexia is that you’ll never be satisfied with your weight or appearance in the mirror.

- **Bulimia Nervosa:** Many people see food as important since it fuels the body but might be unwilling to limit or completely avoid food consumption. Bulimia is a condition where you'll eat large quantities of food in a single sitting (binging) followed by vomiting or taking laxatives to get rid of the food before it goes through your system (purging). The purpose is to be able to eat food while maintaining or even losing weight.

Neither of these conditions rarely ever resolve themselves. The weight loss associated with both anorexia and bulimia never seems to produce satisfaction in body image. In fact, the endless cycle of an eating disorder causes 1 death every 62 minutes in America, according to the [National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders](#). If you suffer from either of these conditions or you know someone who is, seek professional medical help right away.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder

Body dysmorphic disorder is a condition where you're hyper-focused on a certain aspect or aspects of your appearance that you're dissatisfied with. This often causes obsessive thoughts about the flaws you may possess and an extreme willingness to go to ridiculous lengths to "fix" these imperfections.

There's a good chance that the reflection *you* see in the mirror is distorted in some way. Body dysmorphic disorder might cause:

- Desire to undergo frequent cosmetic surgeries to improve your appearance
- Obsessive thoughts about the imperfect characteristic
- Picking at the skin to get rid of skin blemishes, pimples, or scabs

- Wearing an abnormal amount of makeup to portray yourself as “perfect”
- Isolating yourself to avoid coming into contact with others
- Constantly asking those around you if you look flawless

The major problem with body dysmorphic disorder is that the affected individual never feels fulfilled or beautiful.

For example, you may promise your loved ones that this tummy tuck will be your *last* cosmetic surgery, and then



eventually find another physical feature that can use some fixing with surgery too. In severe cases, the obsession with looking perfect can be debilitating. Body dysmorphic disorder often requires help from a mental health professional.

Low Self-Esteem

Aside from diagnosable mental illnesses, negative body image is known for causing unusually low self-esteem. That’s especially the case if you base your worth as an individual entirely around what you see when you look in the mirror.

Low self-esteem might cause you to:

- Avoid social gatherings and large crowds
- Only see your negative traits and characteristics
- Feel unworthy of good things, opportunities, or happiness

- Isolate yourself from those you care about
- Be sensitive to criticism or suggestions
- Experience intense anger or sadness
- Avoid standing up for yourself when being bullied or pressured
- Wear baggy clothing so people don't see the fine details of your body

Low self-esteem related to your physical appearance will slowly seep into every area of your life. You may purposely sabotage friendships and relationships because you feel as if you aren't attractive or good enough to deserve them. You also may develop an entirely negative outlook on life that encourages others to keep their distance from you.

It's also possible that you'll scrutinize your body further instead of willingly accepting compliments from other people. You may believe that people only say nice things to you to make you feel confident and feel better about yourself. As long as you don't look exactly how you'd like, you'll probably be inconsolable.

A qualified mental health professional can help you raise your self-esteem and greatly improve your emotional health and quality of life.

Severe Anxiety or Depression

When your entire life begins to revolve around what you look like, what you see when you look in the mirror, and what you feel *others* see when they look at you, you're opening yourself up to severe anxiety and depression.

Let's talk about how each of these can impact your life.

- **Anxiety:** Severe anxiety can cause your entire life to revolve around your physical appearance. You might panic when you're out in public, fearing that people might be looking at you or judging you. You may be afraid of eating dessert or large meals, as this could cause you to gain weight. You also might end up in front of the mirror repeatedly during the day to make minor touch-ups. Your anxiety might be so severe that you can't focus on anything else or you're kept awake all hours of the night.
- **Depression:** Major depression usually occurs when you feel as if your physical appearance is completely unfixable. You might be "content" with your appearance in the sense that you're not doing anything to improve it, like going to the gym or starting a new diet. Instead, you might be overwhelmed by intense sadness and only be able to see the negative features of your appearance.

Both anxiety and depression can be debilitating, especially as they continue for months or even years. They're known to take over your entire life and can cause you to lose or quit your job, completely give up on hygiene or maintaining your physical appearance and eat very rarely or even obsessively. If you suffer from anxiety or depression seek medical help right away.

25 Ways to Improve Your Body Image: Learn to Love Your Body

The good news is that there are *plenty* of things that you can do to improve your body image today and well into the future. You just have to realize that your body image *won't* change overnight and that it takes some time to completely reverse a negative mindset and perception.

Here are 25 ways that you can improve your body image and learn to love yourself!

1. **Treat yourself well.** Connecting your self-worth to your body image means you probably deprive yourself of positive experiences and rewards. You need to stop punishing yourself for your pitfalls and start appreciating who and what you are. Treat yourself by taking a nice bubble bath, getting a massage, or going to the salon monthly.



2. **Take note of the things you like about yourself.**

You spend so much time being critical of your own appearance that you never take the time to notice your good characteristics. Start keeping track of things that you like about yourself on paper, including physical, emotional, and personality traits and review this list often.

3. **Say nice things to yourself.** When was the last time you said something nice to yourself about your physical appearance? It's probably been a long time. Take the time each day to stand in front of the mirror and notice something

you like about your body. Eventually, you'll come to find the positive in all of your physical characteristics.

- 4. See yourself as a whole person.** If you're putting your entire self-worth in your physical appearance, then you're denying yourself of every other good quality that you possess. Be sure to recognize *all* of the good that you hold, including your personality traits, your skills and abilities, and your contributions to society as a whole.



- 5. Express yourself.** Poor body image may cause you to be afraid of expressing yourself. Just know that you're just as valuable as somebody 50 pounds lighter and a person with different hair color. You can express yourself by talking to those you care about, practicing the arts (visual, writing, or music), or even sharing your story with others.
- 6. Control your social media consumption.** Social media is flooded with heavily filtered and highly edited photos that you're relying on to tell you what you *should* look like. Try to unfollow accounts that assert unrealistic expectations for your body, such as very skinny models. Do your best to limit how long you're on social media to just a few minutes daily.
- 7. Practice meditation techniques.** Negative body image often comes with obsessive and racing thoughts about what you look like and what others might see when they look at you. Meditation is a great way to soothe and

quiet your mind while improving your mental health. All it takes is a simple 2-minute deep breathing exercise to see results.

8. Limit how long you spend in front of the mirror. It's hard to completely get away from mirrors, as they're in your bedroom, bathroom, and just about everywhere in public. All you need is a few minutes in front of the mirror before you leave the house in the morning. Plus, there's no need for that hyper-magnified makeup mirror at all.



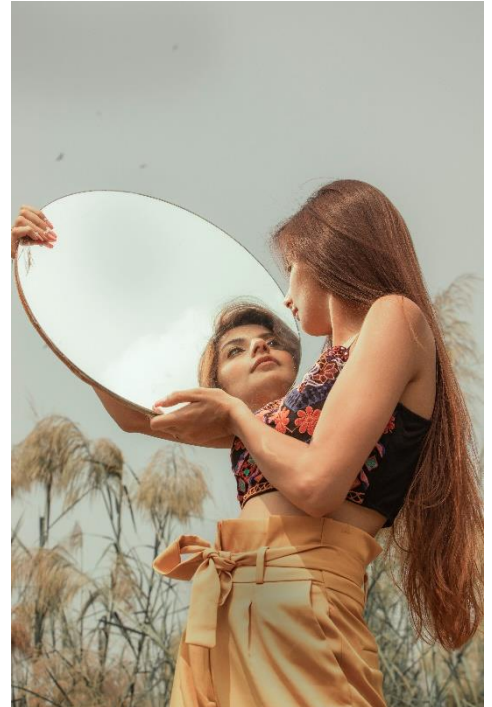
9. Learn about your triggers. You can't fully move past your negative body image until you figure out what's causing it. That means you need to spend some time reflecting to learn what your triggers are. Your triggers could be large meals, specific judgmental people in your life, locations, or people that you see on social media or in magazines.

10. Consider going to therapy or counseling. It's okay to admit that your body image issues have gotten a little out of control and that you need outside help. Going to a therapist or a counselor can help you to work through your feelings, understand your triggers, and learn the best way to cope with these negative thoughts.

11. Talk about it with those closest to you. The only thing more stressful than having a negative body image is being forced to keep these thoughts to yourself. Find somebody that you trust and talk about your insecurities relating to your appearance. This can help others learn how to help you best, such as avoiding certain topics of conversation.

12. Focus on your health instead of your weight.

Your preoccupation with the number on the scale is likely doing more harm than good. After all, your health data is much more important than your body weight. Instead of celebrating a loss of 10 pounds, celebrate a lower blood pressure, cholesterol level, or risk of certain chronic health conditions.



13. Surround yourself with good people. There's a pretty good chance that your body image issues are stemming from the beliefs and generalizations of those in your circle. Perhaps your friends are hyper-critical of the appearances of others or they themselves struggle with low self-esteem. Try to befriend positive, confident, and motivating people.

14. Visit your doctor. You probably have an image in your mind of what you want to look like, but it just isn't realistic. That's why you'll want to pay your doctor a visit and see what they recommend in terms of health goals. You

may learn that your ideal body weight isn't healthy for your height or that your exercise routine is actually dangerous.

15. Create realistic goals. It might be entirely reasonable for a person with your frame to lose 20 pounds. The problem is that it's *not* reasonable to lose this weight in two weeks. Setting unrealistic and unhealthy goals increases your chances of not reaching them at all. This also puts you at risk of taking extreme measures to reach them on time.



16. Compliment other people. You know how hard it is to struggle with poor body image. You also know that the majority of people might struggle to accept the reflection they see in the mirror. Do your best to give genuine compliments to those close to you and even strangers. This can help someone else with their body image and make you feel good and more accepting.

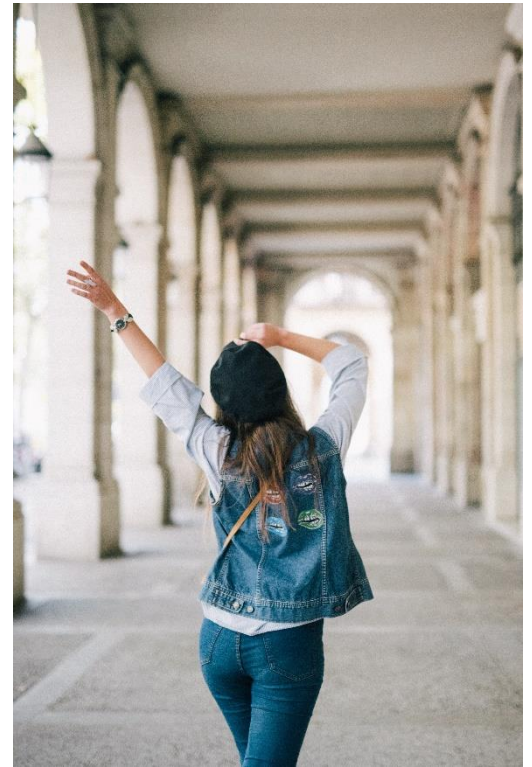
17. Buy clothes that complement your body. You may be insecure with certain areas of your body, but that doesn't mean that you have to hide your *entire* body behind baggy and conservative clothing. Instead, go out and buy clothing that you feel most comfortable wearing. Be sure it's the right size and highlights your best characteristics.

18. Work out regularly. The thought of exercising or going to the gym could be a huge source of anxiety for you. Yet, the research shows that exercise can help to naturally boost your mood and improve your self-esteem in the process. Try getting 150 minutes of exercise per week by walking, jogging, biking, hiking, doing yoga, or lifting weights.

19. Give back to those in need. Sometimes, the best way to make yourself feel better and more confident is by giving back to the community. This can expose you to the struggles that others are facing and make you feel grateful for what you *do* have in life. Volunteer at the local homeless shelter, clean up the trash at the local park, or donate blood.

20. Develop a healthy and well-balanced diet. As triggering as food might be for you, your body desperately needs nutrients and calories as a source of fuel. Place your focus on the nutrients you're getting instead of how many calories you're eating daily. Remember, there's much more to your health than the number you see on the scale.

21. Stop weighing yourself so frequently. Weighing yourself helps to keep track of your health progress, but there's a point at which this habit could turn obsessive. You won't get accurate data by weighing yourself several times



per day or even on a daily basis. Limit weighing yourself to just twice a week or get rid of the scale and trigger altogether.

22. **Get rid of those fitness and diet apps.** Fitness and diet apps can be your worst enemy if you're obsessive about your health. You may obsessively count calories, macronutrients, and even how much exercise you're getting a day. If your whole life revolves around what you eat, it might be time to delete these apps from your phone.
23. **Get a makeover.** Extremely poor body image could be what leads you to ditch the idea of improving your appearance altogether. Instead of settling for what you currently look like, head to the salon or the tailor and get a makeover. Try a new hairstyle or hair color, get your nails done, buy a whole new wardrobe, or even go to the tanning salon.
24. **Find hobbies that keep you occupied.** It's possible that you're preoccupied with your appearance because you're unable to keep your mind busy during the day. It may be time to find a hobby that keeps you active and your attention away from your appearance. You could try hiking, biking, painting, playing guitar, singing or anything else.
25. **Do your research.** As much as you want to believe that you can lose a ton of weight in just a few short days or change the structure of your body with a new product, there's a chance that you're being intentionally misled. Make sure that you're only depending on reliable online sources when you're considering what you should and can look like. Learn how to lose weight safely and permanently from the [Healthy Habits for Weight Loss course](#).

Final Thoughts

Body image is somewhat of a tricky concept. You obviously want to be able to look at yourself in the mirror and feel satisfied with the image reflected back at you. At the same time, spending too much time in front of the mirror can cause immense anxiety and obsessive thoughts.

The most important thing you can do is find a middle ground here.

Try to let go of the standards you hold for yourself when it comes to your physical appearance. Realize that the images of others that you see on social media and in media publications are highly unrealistic. Understand that many characteristics that you have (like your body shape, eye color, or skin color) are out of your control and not worth obsessing over.

Most importantly, learn to love the way you look, imperfections and all. You don't have to look like the people you see in magazines or on Instagram.

It is the greatest gift you can give yourself.

