

# Body Image

**Body Image** refers to the way we perceive our own bodies and the way we assume other people perceive us. "Body image involves our perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of and about our bodies. It's not static, but ever-changing; sensitive to changes in mood, environment, and physical experience. It is not based on fact. It is psychological in nature, and much more influenced by self-esteem than by actual physical attractiveness as judged by others. It is not inborn, but learned. This learning occurs in the family and among peers, but these only reinforce what is learned and expected culturally." [[Lightstone, 1999](#)]. Your body image is a constellation of several components including:



**Visual:** what you see when you look at yourself



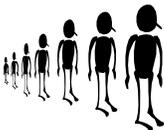
**Emotional:** how you feel about your body



**Kinesthetic:** how you sense and feel your body move



**Historical:** what lasting experiences you remember about your appearance



**Social:** how you view your body in comparison to societal norms

## ***Building a Better Body Image***

Our society is obsessed with looks and weight, but that does not mean we have to passively accept the negative messages we receive about our bodies. Here are some guidelines can help you work toward a positive body image.

- Experiment with what weight feels comfortable to you, rather than trying primarily to be thin. Find your “set point,” a weight where your body feels comfortable and will fight to remain. Accept weight variations throughout the life cycle.
- Most of us judge each of our body parts individually -- my thighs are too fat, my breasts too droopy, my lips too thick. Try experiencing your body as a whole, rather than as separate parts that need improvement.
- Instead of trying to conform to the rigid beauty ideal promoted in the media, experiment with finding a style or look that expresses something about yourself and feels good to you. When you exercise, pay attention to the rhythms and sensations you experience as you move. While exercise is often promoted as a way to lose weight and achieve an idealized body shape, it also often helps us feel good in our bodies, which in turn can help us accept and even celebrate how we look.
- Notice how much time you spend worrying about your looks instead of being aware of what is going on inside of you or around you. Try practicing mindfulness, a technique used in meditation and yoga.
- Give up the media for a week. Forego reading magazines (especially fashion magazines!), watching television, or surfing the Internet. When you get the urge to click the remote control, go for a walk or invite a friend over for tea and conversation. At the end of the week, notice if you feel differently about yourself.
- Include women of all ethnic and racial groups, age groups, sizes, abilities, and sexual orientations in your circle of friends. When we expose ourselves to the rich and varied experiences of all women, our narrow ideas about beauty and bodies often change.
- Kill your inner supermodel. If you have an image of perfection in your head to which you’re constantly comparing yourself, get rid of it. You think your nose is too big? Compared to whose? You consider your stretch marks “flaws”? Where is it written that our bodies should be free of lines or marks or scars? Such bodies do not exist in real life.

### Resources

- VIU Counselling Services, Building 200, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 250.740.6416, [www.viu/counselling.ca](http://www.viu/counselling.ca)
- National Eating Disorders Information Centre (NEDIC). Canadian non-profit group. Comprehensive information. [www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca)
- National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). U.S. based non-profit group. Lots of good information. [www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

### Sources

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University of Calgary – Counselling Services. [www.ucalgary.ca/EAT/body\\_image](http://www.ucalgary.ca/EAT/body_image)