

## Love Your Body

While it is natural to find flaws in ourselves, people with negative body image often take it a few steps further, to the extent that they hate looking at their own bodies and will do anything it takes to achieve their “ideal body” .

The first step to a positive body image is accepting your physical self and realizing that it’s just a part of who you are. It can also be harmful to constantly compare yourself to others. Each person is unique, so it is hard to get a sense of your body’s needs and abilities using someone else’s body as a reference point.

Other tips on how to work towards a positive body image are:

- Limit the amount of “body checking” that you do throughout the day.
- Practice “thought -stopping” when it comes to negative statements about yourself.
- Listen to your body. Eat when you are hungry.
- Exercise regularly in an enjoyable way regardless of size.
- Feel good in the body that you have.
- Do not weigh yourself more than once per week.

We all may have our days when we feel awkward or uncomfortable in our bodies, but the key to developing positive body image is to recognize and respect our natural shape and learn to overpower those negative thoughts and feelings with positive, affirming, and accepting ones.

If you or someone you care about suffers with negative body image, please seek professional help.

## Resources

**CAPS** offers a wide range of confidential services to Penn students including individual, couples, group counseling /therapy. Any of these services can be used to identify your unique stressors and explore strategies that will work for you. Workshops are offered on stress management upon request or when considered appropriate by CAPS’ staff.

Appointments can be made by phone at (215) 898-7021 or in person. A counselor is available week-days for emergency consultation.

CAPS office hours are: Monday thru Friday 9am-5pm

Emergency number after hours: 215-349-5490  
(Ask for CAPS clinician on call)

**Student Health Service/Office of Health  
Promotion & Education**  
3535 Market Street  
215-746-3535

**Athletics (Division of Recreation and  
Intercollegiate Athletics)**  
[www.upenn.edu/recreation](http://www.upenn.edu/recreation)  
215-898-6100



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# BODY IMAGE



## Learning to Love What You See in the Mirror

### CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services  
133 South 36th Street  
Phila., PA 19104  
215-898-7021  
[www.vpul.upenn.edu/caps](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/caps)

# Accept Yourself.....Accept Your Body.....Celebrate Yourself.....Celebrate Your Body

## What is Body Image?

Body image is how we perceive ourselves when we look in the mirror and picture ourselves in our mind. It can impact how we feel about ourselves and how others perceive us in relationships.



Many women in the United States feel pressured to measure up to a certain social and cultural ideal of beauty, which can lead to poor body image. Poor

body image increases the risk for extreme weight/body control behaviors. Researchers have found that that increased preoccupation with appearance and body dissatisfaction put people at a greater risk for engaging in dangerous practices to control weight and size. Some of these include:

- Extreme dieting
- Compulsive exercising
- Abuse of laxatives and/or diet pills
- Vomiting
- Smoking
- Substance abuse

Poor body image has also been linked to diminished mental performance, low self esteem, anxiety, depression and sexual dysfunction. It can cause you to become so preoccupied with weight and dieting that you can lose interest in school or work. In extreme cases, eating disorders can develop, such as anorexia or bulimia.

## Factors that Affect Body Image

Many of our beliefs and attitudes about body image are due to the influence of the media and popular culture. When we read magazines or watch movies, we are inundated with images of perpetually slim and young women. These come to represent the ideals of beauty, despite the fact that, as models and actresses, their beauty is unrealistic. Consequently, a woman feels that she needs to be slim and “perfect” in order to appear healthy, competent, and desirable.

Body image is not just a concern for women; it affects men as well. Research shows that today’s college men are reporting greater levels of body dissatisfaction, and this is true for both gay and heterosexual men .

## Other Factors that Affect Body Image

Body image, whether **negative** or **positive**, is also shaped by a variety of other factors including:

- Both negative and positive remarks from family and friends about themselves or others’ bodies
- Our own ideas that we develop about physical appearance
- Sexual, physical and emotional abuse
- Feeling of inadequacy in comparison to the idealized body shape/size
- The influence of the multibillion dollar diet industry that thrives on promoting insecurities about body image and weight

## Negative body image is...

- \* A distorted perception of your body shape/size
- \* Convincing yourself that you are less attractive than others
- \* Feeling ashamed, self-conscious, and anxious about your body
- \* Feeling awkward and uncomfortable in your own body
- \* Consistently comparing your appearance to those around you

## Positive body image is...

- \* Having a clear, true perception of your body shape/size
- \* Appreciating your natural body shape and understanding that a person’s physical appearance says little about their character and value
- \* Feeling proud and accepting your unique body

