

BODY IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

"Don't judge me as right or wrong, good or bad. I am what I am and that's all I've got" — author unknown

What is body image?

A person's body image is how a person sees or feels about their appearance inside and outside. Because it involves our thoughts, emotions and imagination, it is ever changing. It is not something we are born with, but it is learned from our families, friends and environment.

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is how much a person values his/her own self and appreciates his/her worth. It is a "connection between the mind, body and spirit". Some resources suggest that self-esteem is a combination of three things: competence, confidence and connectedness.

- **Competence** incorporates finding what you feel you are good at, and developing the skills needed to do it. For example: painting, soccer or writing.
- **Confidence** involves feeling good about oneself and those things that are unique about you.
- **Connectedness** is an inner sense of well-being that evolves from relating to those around you and feeling like you belong.

How are self-esteem and body image related?

Body image plays a large factor in a person's self-esteem because most people are concerned about how other people see them and unfortunately, many people judge others by how they look, what they wear, and how their body is shaped.

If a person feels different from others, this can lead to a poor body image and lowered self-esteem.

What shapes a person's self-esteem?

There are a number of factors that help shape a person's self-esteem. Three major factors are puberty, culture and environment.

- **Puberty** is a time of rapid body changes. Everybody goes through this, but it does not happen at the same time for everybody. These rapid changes and the need to fit in make it a very stressful time. Many teens feel that they are not "normal" when they look around at their peers. It is important to remember that puberty happens to everybody; for some it will happen earlier and for others it will happen later. It does not mean you are not "normal".
- **Culture:** Toys, TV, movies and advertising play a strong role in shaping the perception of the ideal body shape. Children today are constantly bombarded with images of unusually thin

models, actresses and even toys. This often leads to teens feeling "abnormal" if they do not look like the men and women in magazines and movies. It is crucial to know that a person's self worth is not determined by his/her body size. It is more important to live a healthy lifestyle than to try to change your body to fit an unrealistic ideal.

- **Environment:** A person's self-esteem can be affected by what they see and hear around them. If children or teens constantly hear criticism from parents or painful teasing from peers, they may only think negative thoughts about themselves, which can lead to a lowered self-esteem.

Boost your self-esteem

- Get to know yourself: your values, family history and culture, likes and dislikes.
- Set realistic goals and expectations. It is OK to make mistakes.
- Set your own standards instead of letting the media or others set them for you.
- Find real-life role models instead of fashion models and movie stars.
- Take care of your body: respect it and accept it. Remember that real bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- Remember that your body is changing, and it is a work in progress. Try not to worry about what others think of you. They are probably dealing with the same issues.
- Exercise helps you feel better about your appearance and improves your mood and health.

Where can I go for help?

If you are concerned about your self-esteem or body image, contact a trusted medical professional or your diabetes educator for help. You are not alone. There are many resources out there.

Some helpful books and resources

- *Real Gorgeous: The Truth about Body and Beauty*, by Kaz Cooke
- *Your Body, Yourself: A Guide to Your Changing Body*, by Alison Bell
- *Feed Your Head: Some Excellent Stuff on Being Yourself*, by Earl Hipp and L.K. Hanson
- *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, by Mary Pipher

Websites:

- BCCH Youth Health Clinic: www.bcchildrens.ca/our-services/clinics/youth-health-clinic
- www.girlshealth.gov
- www.teenshealth.org
- www.advocatesforyouth.org

Local Programs

- iGirl!: www.saleemanoon.com/igirl/