

## RESOURCES ABOUT BODY IMAGE

Prepared by Our Bodies Ourselves: [www.ourbodiesourselves.org](http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org)

Improving Body Image © by Judy Lightstone (drawn from: [http://www.edreferral.com/body\\_image.htm](http://www.edreferral.com/body_image.htm))

"If we place pornography and the tyranny of slenderness alongside one another we have the two most significant obsessions of our culture, and both of them focused upon a woman's body." -Kim Chernin

Body image involves our perception, imagination, emotions, and physical sensations of and about our bodies. It is 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.

In this culture, we women are starving ourselves, starving our children and loved ones, gorging ourselves, gorging our children and loved ones, alternating between starving and gorging, purging, obsessing, and all the while hating, pounding and wanting to remove that which makes us female: our bodies, our curves, our pear-shaped selves.

"Cosmetic surgery is the fastest growing 'medical' specialty.... Throughout the 80s, as women gained power, unprecedented numbers of them sought out and submitted to the knife...." - Naomi Wolf

....Our psychological boundaries develop early in life, based on how we are held and touched (or not held and touched). A person who is deprived of touch as an infant or young child, for example, may not have the sensory information s/he needs to distinguish between what is inside and what is outside her/himself. As a result, boundaries may be unclear or unformed. This could cause the person to have difficulty getting an accurate sense of his/her body shape and size. This person might also have difficulty eating, because they might have trouble sensing the physical boundaries of hunger and fullness or satiation. On the other extreme, a child who is sexually or physically abused may feel terrible pain and shame or loathing associated to his/her body. Such a person might use food or starvation to continue the physical punishments they grew familiar with in childhood.

### Developing a Healthy Body Image

Here are some guidelines (Adapted from *BodyLove: Learning to Like Our Looks and Ourselves*, Rita Freeman, Ph.D.) that can help you work toward a positive body image:

1. Listen to your body. Eat when you are hungry.
2. Be realistic about the size you are likely to be based on your genetic and environmental history..
3. Exercise regularly in an enjoyable way, regardless of size.
4. Expect normal weekly and monthly changes in weight and shape

5. Work towards self acceptance and self forgiveness- be gentle with yourself.
6. Ask for support and encouragement from friends and family when life is stressful.
7. Decide how you wish to spend your energy -- pursuing the "perfect body image" or enjoying family, friends, school and, most importantly, life.

Think of it as the three A's....

**Attention** -- Refers to listening for and responding to internal cues (i.e., hunger, satiety, fatigue).

**Appreciation** -- Refers to appreciating the pleasures your body can provide.

**Acceptance** -- Refers to accepting what is -- instead of longing for what is not.

Healthy body weight is the size a person naturally returns to after a long period of both non-compulsive eating\* and consistent exercise commensurate with the person's physical health and condition. We must learn to advocate for ourselves and our children to aspire to a naturally determined size, even though that will often mean confronting misinformed family, friends, and media advertising again and again.

\*Simply stated, non-compulsive eating means eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are satisfied. This involves being able to distinguish emotional hunger from physical hunger, and satiation from over fullness.

Judy Lightstone is, M.F.C.C. is a licensed Marriage, Family, Child Counselor in Berkely, CA. For more on this article visit [http://www.psychotherapist.org/Index\\_archives\\_bodyimage.htm](http://www.psychotherapist.org/Index_archives_bodyimage.htm).

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### ***Battling Our Bodies? Understanding and Overcoming Negative Body Images***

by Nicole Hawkins, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist at Center for Change,  
[www.centerforchange.com](http://www.centerforchange.com)

How often do you look in the mirror and say "If I could just lose ten pounds, then I would be happy"? Unfortunately, the majority of American women and girls are dissatisfied with their bodies, and many take extreme measures in an attempt to change their bodies. For example, one study found that 63% of female participants identified weight as the key factor in determining how they felt about themselves -- more important than family, school, or career. Other research suggests that 86% of all women are dissatisfied with their bodies and want to lose weight. Women and adolescent girls regard size, much like weight, as a definitive element of their identity. Some girls assume there is something wrong with their bodies when they cannot fit consistently into some "standard" size; others will reject a pair of jeans simply because they won't wear a particular size.

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For more information on the treatment and prevention of eating disorders please visit the Eating Disorder Referral and Information Center at [www.EDReferral.com](http://www.EDReferral.com).