

# Your Body Image: *Learn to Like What You See*



Your looks are  
just one part  
of who you are.



*Strong, healthy bodies  
come in all shapes  
and sizes.*

**H**ow do you see yourself? Can you look in a mirror and say, “I like my body the way it is”? If not, what stops you? Have you ever thought about where you get the ideas that you have about your body?

Some of your ideas come from what you’ve heard your family members say about your body and about other people’s bodies. Other ideas come from your views on how your body has changed as you’ve grown and your views on how your body feels to you. For some, ideas about body image come from the culture or community lived in. Accidents or illnesses that affect your body can also affect the way you view it. Of course, messages from television, magazines, and other media also greatly influence how we see ourselves.

## You can change your body image!

Everyone wants to look good. But looking your best does not mean the same as trying to look like someone else. Find your own “look.” Here are some ideas to help.

### 1. Think about where the negative messages come from.

- Advertisers make money by showing you what is wrong with you and then by selling you something to fix it. They present images that tell you what is “sexy” and “beautiful.” If you don’t fit the mold (and most of us don’t), it’s easy to think that you’re ugly. Ask yourself, “What are they trying to sell? Do I want to buy that?” Fashion is fun, but try not to let it tell you how to feel about yourself.

### What do you see when you look at yourself?

- Do you worry about what people think of your looks?
- Do you compare your looks to models, actors or athletes and end up feeling bad?
- Does the number on the bathroom scale determine how you feel about yourself?
- Do you believe your life would be better if you changed your looks?
- Do you feel fat or too thin most of the time?
- Do other people’s comments about weight (yours or their own) affect how you see yourself?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are not alone. Many teens are unhappy about their looks and bodies. We all go through this. Think of ways to challenge these negative thoughts so that you can have a better body image.

- People who care about you still might say things that hurt you. Sometimes when people argue, they say things they don’t mean. Other times, people don’t think about how you will feel about what they say.
- People who don’t know you may put you down—in the hallway at school or even on the street. They may do it because they are not happy with themselves, or they may not have any reason at all. Try to let it go. Either way, it’s what you think about yourself that matters.

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## 2. Don't blame your body for everything that goes wrong.

When you're upset about something you might start thinking "If I were just a little thinner ..." When you start to blame your body, ask yourself, "What am I *really* upset about?" Feeling good about who you are has to come from what you think, say, and do.

## 3. Diets don't work. Listening to what your body needs does.

Are you tired of dieting, counting calories, and then eating too much because you feel so hungry? Are you sick of looking in the mirror and saying "yuck"? Let's face it, diets don't work.

The first step to feeling better about your body and being healthy is to stop dieting. The next step is to get the right amount of healthy foods and exercise for *your* body.

If you are worried about dieting, overeating, or exercising too much, ask someone you trust for help—like a parent, doctor, or teacher.

## 4. Make a pact.

When you find yourself looking in the mirror and thinking negative thoughts, stop yourself and notice something positive instead. Make a pact with yourself to be kind to your body. You can begin to like yourself for more things than your appearance. Think of all the good things you have to offer from inside yourself, and good feelings about the outside will follow. Get involved in activities, hobbies, or volunteer work that helps you feel good about yourself.

## 5. Take steps to change the world around you.

After you begin sticking up for your own body, you can start to work on what you see and hear happening to others in your school and community who are put down for their body type. Is body size really the most important thing about a person? Do you pick your friends based on how they look? What do you want your friends to like about you?

## Who defines the "look"?

Many models and actors in magazines and films are very thin people with perfect skin. Female models are much thinner than most women. Male models are much bigger and more muscular than most men. Most people will never look like models because their bodies are not made that way.

Do people in magazines and television look like regular people? Most models and actors don't even look that way in everyday life! The pictures are redone to make them look perfect.

Lots of young people try to change their bodies by dieting all the time. Dieting doesn't give their bodies what they need to stay strong. Some young people use steroids and unhealthy weight-gain products to try to look like famous athletes.

How do media, family and friends affect the way you feel about your body? Think about it.

### **Remember . . .**

Prejudice against people because of the way they are shaped is discrimination—just like racism, sexism, and other types of discrimination.

## Getting help in the Kaiser Permanente system

Teens can make their own appointments and come in to see a doctor, nurse, or counselor at Kaiser Permanente clinics. Some Kaiser Permanente facilities have a teen clinic with information and services especially for teens. All facilities have doctors, nurses, health educators, or mental health professionals who see teen patients.

## Other resources

### Books

- *Hunger Pains*, Mary Pipher, PhD., Random House, Inc., New York, New York Rev. ed. 1997.
- *When Girls Feel Fat: Helping Girls Through Adolescence*, S. Freidman, Harper-Collins, ISBN: 0006385613.
- *Surviving an Eating Disorder : Strategies for Family and Friends*, M. Siegel & J. Brisman, Harper-Collins, 1997, ISBN: 0060952334.
- *When Your Child has an Eating Disorder*, A. Natenshon, Jossey-Bass, 1999, ISBN 0-7879-4578-1
- *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*

### Web sites

- Something Fishy  
[www.something-fishy.org](http://www.something-fishy.org)
- Food and Nutrition Information Center, sponsored by the USDA  
[www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000017.html#eatdis](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000017.html#eatdis)
- About-face (body image and media)  
[www.about-face.org](http://www.about-face.org)
- Eating Disorders Awareness & Prevention (EDAP)  
[www.edap.org](http://www.edap.org)
- TeensHealth  
[www.kidshealth.org/teen](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen)
- Kaiser Permanente  
[www.kp.org](http://www.kp.org)

Call the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone (1-800-33-ASK ME)

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.