

**Body Image by Cindy Maynard, MS, RD**

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### **BODY IMAGE, BODY LOVE:**

**Why is a positive body image so important? Psychologists and counselors agree that a negative body image is directly related to self esteem. The more negative the perception of our bodies, the more negative we feel about ourselves.**

**Being a teenager is a time of major change. Besides the obvious changes in size and shape, teens are faced with how they feel about themselves. Body image and self esteem are two important ways to help promote a positive image.**

**When most people think about body image they think about aspects of physical appearance, attractiveness, and beauty. But body image is much more. It is the mental picture a person has of his/her body as well as their thoughts, feelings, judgments, sensations, awareness and behavior. Body image is developed through interactions with people and the social world. It's our mental picture of ourselves; it's what allows us to become ourselves.**

**Body image influences behavior, self esteem, and our psyche. When we feel bad about our body, our satisfaction and mood plummets. If we are constantly trying to push, reshape or remake our bodies, our sense of self becomes unhealthy. We lose confidence in our abilities. It's not uncommon for people who think poorly of their bodies to have problems in other areas of their lives, including sexuality, careers and relationships.**

**A healthy body image occurs when a person's feelings about his/her body is positive, confident and self caring. This image is necessary to care for the body, find outlets for self-expression, develop confidence in one's physical abilities and feel comfortable with who you are.**

**Self esteem is a personal evaluation of one's worth as a person. It measures how much you respect yourself**

**physically: (how happy you are with the way you look)**

**intellectually (how well you feel you can accomplish your goals)**

**emotionally (how much you feel loved)**

**morally (how you think of yourself as a person)**

**How you see yourself affects every part of your life. High self esteem makes for a happier life. It allows you to be your own person and not have others define you.**

**Self esteem, self confidence and self respect are all related. Self esteem is also defined as the judgments a person makes about themselves and is affected by self confidence and respect. Self confidence is believing in our ability to take action and meet our goals. Self respect is the degree to which we believe we deserve to be happy, have rewarding relationships and stand up for our rights and values. All these factors affect whether or not we will have a healthy body image.**

**To begin to achieve healthy images of ourselves and our bodies is a challenge. Here are some things you can do to start feeling better about your body and yourself:**

#### **MAKING PEACE WITH YOUR BODY AND SELF:**

**When you look in the mirror, make yourself find at least one good point for every demerit you give. Become aware of your positives.**

**Decide which of the cultural pressures - glamour, fitness, thinness, media, peer group - prevent you from feeling good about yourself. How about not buying fashion magazines which promote unrealistic body images?**

**Exercise gets high marks when it comes to breeding positive body feelings. It makes us feel better about our appearance, and improves our health and mood.**

**Emphasize your assets. You've got lots. Give yourself credit for positive qualities. If there are some things you want to change, remember self-discovery is a lifelong process.**

**Make friends with the person you see in the mirror. Say, "I like what I see. I like me." Do it until you believe it.**

**Question ads. Instead of saying, "What's wrong with me," say, "What's wrong with this ad?" Write the company. Set your own standards instead of letting the media set them for you.**

**Ditch dieting and bail on the scale. These are two great ways to develop a healthy relationship with your body and weight.**

**Challenge size-bigotry and fight size discrimination whenever you can. Don't speak of yourself or others with phrases like "fat slob," "pig out," or "thunder thighs."**

**Be an example to others by taking people seriously for what they say, feel, and do rather than how they look.**

**Accept the fact your body's changing. In teen years, your body is a work in progress. Don't let every new inch or curve throw you off the deep end.**

**You know you are successful when you can look in the mirror and instead of asking, "What's wrong with it," and say, "There's nothing really wrong with me." And little by little you'll find you can stop disliking your body. When Clister Smith, age 15, was asked how we can like our bodies better he says, "Quit worrying about what others think of you. If you want to change your body, do it for yourself, and not anyone else."**

**This is the starting point. It is from this new way of looking at a problem that we can begin to feel better about ourselves. Make this the time to accept the natural dimensions of our bodies instead of drastically trying to change them. We can't exchange our bodies for a new one. So the best thing is to find peace with the one we have. Your body is where you're going to be living the rest of your life. Isn't it about time you made it home?**

**Cindy Maynard, M.S.,R.D. is a health & medical writer and registered dietitian living in San Diego, California. Copyright, Current Health 2, 1998, Weekly Reader Corp., All Rights Reserved.**