weight does not dictate your health or your worth

CULTIVATING A POSITIVE BODY IMAGE
What is body dissatisfaction?

- **Body image**, referring to one’s perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about one’s body, is understood to be subjective and linked to a person’s well-being.

- While **body dissatisfaction, or negative body image**, can affect both men and women of all ages, evidence suggests that it is a highly prevalent and severe problem among female college students.

- Body dissatisfaction has recently been identified as a growing problem among male college students as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Body Image</th>
<th>Negative Body Image</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True perception of your shape</td>
<td>Distorted perception of size or shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrate and appreciated natural body shape</td>
<td>Compare your body to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that physical appearance says little about character and values</td>
<td>Belief that size or shape is an important indicator of worth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proud and accepting of your unique body</td>
<td>Feelings of shame, awkwardness, and anxiety about the body</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited time spent worrying about food, exercise and body</td>
<td>Obsessive thinking about food, exercise and body</td>
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<tr>
<td>You feel confident and comfortable in your body</td>
<td>Belief that size or shape is a sign of personal failure</td>
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</table>
Where does body image come from?

- Cultural ideals of beauty
  - Communicated through mass media
  - Changes over time
- Social messages
  - Messages given by peers, family, teachers, coaches
- Personal characteristics
  - Perfectionism
  - Tendency to compare oneself to others
  - Gender
  - Cultural factors

Body confidence does not come from trying to achieve the “perfect body”; it comes from embracing the one you’ve already got.
The impact of media messages

- Media messages can distort people’s perceptions of their own body shape and size

- Media messages can decrease satisfaction in one’s own body

- Media messages can contribute to bulimia, anorexia nervosa, and obsessive/disordered eating and exercising
Stop negative self-talk

For individuals...

• Thoughts matter.

  Negative self-talk is associated with:
  • Low self-esteem and self confidence
  • Greater body dissatisfaction
  • Thin-ideal internalization (The idea that beautiful = thin)

• **Speak smarter:** Stop saying disparaging or negative things about your body. Try speaking about your body in a positive way!

For our society...

• Negative self-talk perpetuates a never-ending cycle of personal dissatisfaction and distorted norms about body image

• Research suggests that people have more positive reactions towards peers who speak about their own bodies in a positive way!
Ways to improve your body image

1. Don’t focus on what other people’s bodies look like or compare yourself to others.

2. Remember that things we see in print or on TV have been altered with Photoshop and other camera tricks.

3. Practice gratitude when you think about your body; focus on the amazing things it does rather than what it looks like.

4. Focus on positive, health-based reasons to eat well and exercise, not appearance-based reasons.

5. Surround yourself with people who support you and make you feel good about yourself.

6. Embrace the things about your appearance that make you unique.

7. Practice radical self-love: Accept and honor yourself the way you are right now.

“Enjoy your body, use it every way that you can. Don’t be afraid of it, or what other people think of it. It’s the greatest instrument you’ll ever own.”

-Kurt Vonnegut
Positive body image will not make you “unhealthy”

• A lot of people worry that without body dissatisfaction, they will lose their motivation to stay fit and healthy.

• But contrary to popular belief, fear, shame, and self-disgust are NOT good motivators. They may prompt people to change their habits temporarily, but not long-term. They also can cause psychological, emotional, and physical harm.

• Instead of relying on body dissatisfaction, draw motivation from positive sources, like the desire to explore new hobbies (yoga, archery, kickball), to achieve new goals (run a 5k, learn to surf), or to enjoy the flavor and feeling you get from nourishing your body with nutrition-rich foods.
Body Image Resources

**EARS (Empathy Assistance and Referral Service):** Cornell students provide walk-in and telephone peer counseling and referral service, as well as outreach programs on request. Contact EARS at 211 Willard Straight Hall; 607 255-EARS.

**The Cornell Healthy Eating Program** at Gannett (CHEP) is designed to help optimize your health and performance as a student through good nutrition, knowledge and practice. More detailed information about CHEP, eating well, body image, eating problems, special nutrition topics, helping a friend, and links to other resources are available at [www.gannett.cornell.edu/CHEP](http://www.gannett.cornell.edu/CHEP)

**Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS):** University life can generate academic, emotional, and social concerns. Everyone experiences them; but at times these concerns can make it difficult to function. It is a sign of intelligence and strength to recognize when you may need help.

- Please call CAPS at 255-5155 to explore how we can help you, or a person about whom you are concerned, through counseling or referral to more appropriate services.

For more information and support, visit [www.gannett.cornell.edu](http://www.gannett.cornell.edu) and search “body image.”
"Even when someone gets to looking like she should be so proud of herself, instead she’s like, ‘I could be another three pounds less; I could be a little taller and have bigger lips.’ Where does it end? You just have to say, ‘It’s pretty damn good. I am right here at the moment and I’m OK with it. I’ve got other things to think about.’"

-Melissa McCarthy

I STAND
FOR DOING WHAT YOU LOVE IN THE BODY YOU HAVE NOW.

Stop weight bigotry. Health At Every Size®