



# Recovery Session:

## Body Image and Coping Behaviours

### **DISCLAIMER**

*This resource is a work in progress. It was created by two students from within the Body Brave community and is not fully representative of the spectrum of experience. If you have any suggestions to improve this resource or lived experiences that you don't see represented here, please email [info@bodybrave.ca](mailto:info@bodybrave.ca).*

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### **WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?**

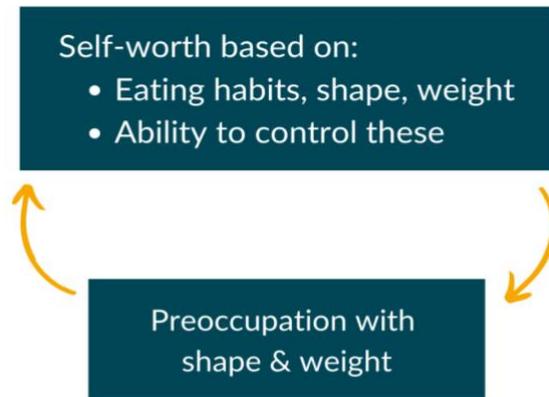
Body image is what you believe about your own appearance.<sup>1</sup> It may include:

- How you feel about your body
- How you sense and control your body as you move
- How you physically experience or feel in your body

People with negative body image have a greater likelihood of developing an eating disorder and are more likely to suffer from feelings of depression, isolation, low self-esteem, and obsessions with weight loss or weight control.<sup>1</sup>

Negative body image can impact individuals of every age, race, size and gender. Individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, racialized communities, transitional life stages (ex. pregnancy, gender transition), athletes, and military personnel may be at greater risk for negative body image.

Individuals may derive their self-worth from their ability to control their eating habits, shape, and weight. This can lead to a preoccupation with shape and weight, which can perpetuate a cycle of negative body image.



Source: Centre for Clinical Interventions. <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/CCI/Consumer-Modules/Overcoming-Disordered-Eating---Part-B/Overcoming-disordered-eating-04-Body-checking-avoidance-of-feeling-fat.pdf>

## WHAT ARE BODY IMAGE COPING BEHAVIOURS?

Individuals with negative body image may begin to rely on body image coping behaviours like body checking and body avoidance to help regulate their emotions.<sup>3</sup> Body checking and body avoidance behaviours exist on a spectrum. Frequent checking can alternate with avoidance and vice-versa, and both can occur at the same time.

### > BODY CHECKING

When self-worth is connected with controlling eating habits and body shape, one may become preoccupied with body checking.<sup>2</sup> The body checking behaviour may feel like a compulsion and the individual may not be aware of how often they are doing it. Body checking behaviour may be an attempt to feel better about one's body, but instead it increases body dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, and feelings of loss of control.<sup>7</sup>

Some examples of body checking include:

- € Studying yourself in the mirror and focusing on certain parts
- € Frequently comparing yourself to others
- € Hyper-focusing on certain areas of your body
- € Regularly pinching and/or feeling certain areas of your body
- € Measuring parts of your body with hands or a tape measure
- € Repeatedly assessing the fit of your clothing
- € Weighing yourself frequently
- € Regularly seeking reassurance from others (ex. asking a loved one for their opinion about your appearance)

## > BODY AVOIDANCE

In contrast to body checking, some individuals with negative body image may avoid looking at their body altogether, or alternate between checking and avoiding.<sup>4</sup> Avoidance can be just as problematic as checking, and can negatively influence body image. Avoiding behaviours might include:

- Wearing loose clothing
- Avoiding the mirror
- Avoiding clothes shopping
- Avoiding close physical contact
- Avoiding swimming or sports

Body checking and body avoidance become problematic when they are compulsive, linked with negative emotions, and occurring at high frequencies.

*\* Time to Reflect: Do you recognize any of these behaviours in yourself? Which ones do you use most often?*

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## WHY ARE BODY CHECKING AND AVOIDANCE HARMFUL?

Body checking and body avoidance are short-term coping strategies with harmful long-term impacts, such as:<sup>4</sup>

1. Maintaining preoccupation with weight and shape
2. Forming an inaccurate assessment of weight and shape
3. Distorting negative perceptions or 'problems' with weight and shape
4. Favouring selective comparisons by comparing only to those that we think we "should" look like, which often makes us feel worse

## Tips for Reducing Body Checking

Try these helpful tips to reduce body checking.<sup>4</sup>

1. Use the log at the end of this resource to help you determine the extent and frequency of your checking/avoidance. Which behaviours occur for you and how many times each day do they happen?
2. When you notice that you are body checking, ask yourself:<sup>7</sup>
  - a. What am I looking for?
  - b. Is this helpful?
  - c. Has anything changed since the last time I body checked?
3. Based on the body checking log, set specific goals to help improve the behaviour. You may try:<sup>4</sup>
  - a. Reducing (ex. aiming for 3x/day instead of 6x/day)
  - b. Eliminating (stopping altogether)
  - c. Postponing (ex. not checking your body until after work)
4. Starting with easier goals and making changes gradually can help make your goals more sustainable.
5. Reward yourself for progress by doing something you love.
6. Attend Body Brave Recovery Sessions to get regular support!

**\* Let's set a goal!** Choose one of the tips above and write a goal that you can work on this week. For example: *When I notice myself pinching my arms, I will catch the behaviour and repeat my favourite affirmation five times.*

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## BODY IMAGE ACTIVITIES

### JOURNAL PROMPTS

Choose a journal prompt. Set a timer on your phone for 3-5 minutes and start writing!

- Write three things that you're grateful your body allows you to do.
- Write a short thank you letter to your body for allowing you to live your life.
- Write a letter to your younger self to help gain confidence and body image.
- Pick three aspects of your body that you struggle with and for each aspect, complete the following sentence, more than once: I am grateful for \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.
- Describe what making peace with your body would feel like.
- Think of a time when you felt really proud of yourself/your body. What was happening? How did you feel?
- Think about a part of your body that you may struggle with. What would your 90-year-old self say to you?
- What is one thing you're looking forward to doing that your body allows you to do?
- Choose an affirmation below that resonates with you today and copy that affirmation down 10 times.

Journal prompts were sourced from Colleen Christensen at [Colleen Christensen Nutrition](#) <sup>5</sup>

### AFFIRMATIONS

Practice these affirmations to shift negative thoughts to neutral thoughts. You can memorize them and say them to yourself, put them in a note on your phone, write them on a piece of paper and carry them in your pocket, or put them on a sticky note next to your mirror. Choose the ones that resonate with you and reach for them in moments of stress, anxiety, or low body image. These affirmations were sourced from the Intuitively You Affirmation Deck by Jenn Baswick at [Intuitively You](#).<sup>6</sup>

*I honour the space between where I am and where I want to be.*

*Changing my body won't improve my body image, changing my mind will.*

*I embrace my emotions with kindness.*

*There is no such thing as perfect and that's okay.*

*My body is my home.*

*The weight, shape, size of my body does not define my worth.*

*I am practicing being comfortable in my own body.*

*All bodies are good bodies, including mine.*

## FURTHER LEARNING

### Podcasts

[Food Psych with Christy Harrison](#) A podcast about intuitive eating, body image, and diet culture to help challenge restrictive dieting behaviors and learn some useful body-confidence strategies along the way.

[The Body Image Podcast with Corrine Dobbas, MS, RD](#) The Body Image Podcast is a podcast about body image and the many layers that go into making peace with our bodies. Like intuitive eating, self-compassion, mental health, self-care, body and size acceptance, embodiment, rejecting diet culture, and more.

[The Recovery Warrior Show](#) A podcast dedicated to boosting the emotional intelligence and resilience of people struggling with depression, anxiety and eating disorders.

### TED Talks

[Believing is seeing: a new perspective on body dysmorphia | Meredith Leston | TEDxOxford](#)

[Body Positivity or Body Obsession? Learning to See More & Be More | Lindsay Kite | TEDxSaltLakeCity](#)

### Reading

[Body Respect: What Conventional Health Books Get Wrong, Leave Out, and Just Plain Fail to Understand about Weight](#)

## BODY CHECKING LOG

Body Checking Behaviour	Situation or Trigger	Negative Body Talk Thought	Body Positive Thought or Body Positive Kindness Action

## REFERENCES

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