



MEDIA AND BODY IMAGE

Media play a large role in young people's lives today, including television and music (radio and recordings), videos and movies, computers, print media, and video games. Along with many positive aspects, media often play a negative and unhealthy role in shaping young women's ideas about how they should look. It is important to learn how to recognize such influences and how to deal with them in a healthy way.

Trying to imitate the body images presented by the media can hurt your mental and physical health. Some young women even risk their health and life trying to imitate these images.

- The media generally show underweight women as the ideal body type. The average model today actually only represents 5% of females in the country.
- Many times, images are not even real. They show actors who have been professionally made up for the camera or have had plastic surgery or other procedures. Photographs usually are touched up and changed so they do not show how people really look.
- Images of young women often make it seem like their value depends on sexual appeal or behavior and that their role is to do what other people want rather than to be independent and able to make up their own minds.

What are warning signs of an unhealthy body image?

- Viewing yourself only in terms of physical looks.
- Using negative language to describe yourself based on physical development and attractiveness.
- Worrying about sexual attractiveness, feeling depressed, or developing a low self-esteem.

What can be done to improve your body image?

- Form a realistic description of your body and base self-esteem on a wide range of personal traits.
- Develop your full personality, including nonphysical attributes.
- Value yourself as an individual.
- Become informed about healthy physical development and individual differences.
- Eat a healthy diet and exercise to maintain good health.
- Participate in positive family, peer, school, and community activities to enhance self-esteem based on your abilities and character rather than your appearance.

What can be done to decrease the influence of the media?

- Make yourself aware of media messages aimed at women and young people.
- Look at your own use of the media and reactions to messages about attractiveness and self-worth.
- Identify and be critical of media messages that are inaccurate and unhealthy.
- Use media resources that promote healthy development and behavior.
- Do not use negative terms that are body related, such as fat and ugly.
- Speak out against the negative and physically harmful ways the media shows girls and women.





For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444

Web: www.acog.org

American Society of Plastic Surgeons

Telephone: (847) 228-9900

Web: www.plasticsurgery.org

Center for Media Literacy

Telephone: (310) 456-1225

Web: www.medialit.org

Girl Power!

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

Telephone: (800) 729-6686

Web: www.girlpower.gov

Girls, Women + Media Project

Web: www.mediaandwomen.org/

Love Your Body Campaign

National Organization for Women (NOW) Foundation

Telephone: (202) 628-8NOW (8669)

Web: www.loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders

Telephone: (847) 831-3438

Web: www.anad.org

National Eating Disorders Association

Telephone: (206) 382-3587

Toll-free Information and Referral Helpline: (800) 931-2237

Web: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

The National Women's Health Information Center

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Office of Women's Health

Telephone: (800) 994-9662

Web: www.4woman.gov/bodyimage