

Changing the way you see yourself



Many overweight people who enroll in a weight loss program suffer from severe stress, depression or other emotional and psychological problems. Increased emotional stress frequently leads to anxiety, depression, mood swings and binge eating.

Overweight individuals with marked depression, anxiety or eating disorders may require psychotherapy before attempting weight loss. Counseling may help them reduce their focus on weight loss and food, improve their self-esteem and body image and establish a more constructive focus in life.

Fear of gaining weight is a major barrier to smoking cessation, especially for overweight people. Nevertheless, overweight people who smoke should try to quit. The majority of people who quit smoking do gain weight, but the average is only 4.5–7 pounds (about 2–3 kilograms). This amount of weight gain is far less likely to produce health problems than continuing to smoke. For practical reasons, it may be better to avoid trying to quit smoking and lose weight at the same time.

Practice positive thinking, especially about body image

Most people are constantly observing and evaluating themselves, drawing conclusions about who they are and attaching labels to themselves. Often the labels are related to appearance and determine “body image” — the way individuals perceive themselves in their mind’s eye.

Poor body image can sabotage efforts to make positive lifestyle changes. For example, if a person labels themselves as uncoordinated and unathletic, they may resist physical activity.

If a person labels themselves as overweight and unattractive, they may feel depressed and support that belief by overeating. People may even resist wearing stylish clothes that fit nicely.

Practice affirmations

Affirmations are positive, motivating statements that individuals say to themselves regularly. For best results, affirmations should be spoken out loud at least five times while looking in the mirror, with real commitment to each repetition. A good time to practice affirmations is while standing in front of the mirror after brushing your teeth in the morning or before going to bed.

Affirmations can be written on an index card and carried for easy access. Using statements that begin with “I am,” “I can,” or “I will” is more effective than using “I am not” statements. After repeating the affirmation, visualizations can be used to create a mental picture of the desired self.

Examples of affirmations for weight management:

- I am pleased about the weight I have lost.
- I am confident I can keep the weight off.
- I am improving my health by eating healthier and managing my weight.
- I am feeling better about myself.

Building a positive body image is a very important part of lifestyle management, especially weight management. Some people with excess weight focus on the time when they will be thin. It is better to focus on the present and not wait until a goal weight is achieved to start feeling good. It may be unrealistic to be as thin as desired, but weight can be lost to attain a healthier weight goal and improve health. People who like and care about themselves are often more likely to follow a healthy eating pattern and stay active.

**Activity:****Set a goal to improve your body image**

Mark any of the actions listed below that you will take to build a better body image.

- ☐ *Think of yourself as an attractive person.* Accent your best features. Get a flattering haircut, manicure or facial to reinforce your attractive self-image.
- ☐ *Buy stylish clothes that fit you comfortably.* Baggy clothes won't cover up your weight problem and clothes that fit too tightly won't motivate you to lose weight. You deserve to look nice.
- ☐ *Focus on your strengths every day.* Build new strengths. Remind yourself of your accomplishments with positive self-talk and affirmations.
- ☐ *Be nice to yourself. Do things you enjoy.* As you start to make positive changes, try new activities you always told yourself you couldn't do before. Take dancing lessons, learn to play tennis or go snow skiing, for example.
- ☐ *Treat yourself like a beloved friend.* Imagine a very special guest is visiting your home. How would you treat this person? You're just as important. There is no one else as important or deserving as you.
- ☐ *Try to be more outgoing in social situations.* Learn to feel comfortable talking with others and sharing information about yourself. Learn to listen for and accept compliments.
- ☐ *Give yourself time to see the "new you".* Your body image may not immediately reflect the new, active, thinner, healthier you. You may not see yourself as others see you. It will take time to realize that you have really changed.
- ☐ *Keep your body image accurate and current as you become active and lose weight.* Look in mirrors or catch your reflection in windows. Take photos of yourself as you slim down. Try on clothes in new, smaller sizes. Take your measurements.

Tables, lists, interactive questions and charts marked with an asterisk (*) and certain other content are used with permission of INTERVENT International, LLC, which owns the copyright to the content.