

Most college students wish they were thinner, study shows

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Most normal-weight women -- almost 90 percent in a Cornell study of 310 college students -- yearn to be thinner. Half of underweight women want to lose even more weight, or stay just the way they are, thank you very much.

Meanwhile, most overweight women don't want to be thin enough to achieve a healthy weight.

According to the study, one of the few to quantify the magnitude of body-weight dissatisfaction, which was published recently in the journal *Eating Behaviors*, most -- 78 percent -- of the overweight males surveyed also want to weigh less. But of this group, almost two-thirds -- 59 percent -- do not want to lose enough, so the body weight they desire would still keep them overweight.

More than 60 percent of U.S. adults are considered overweight or obese. And "because they don't meet the societal ideals propagated by the media and advertising for body weight, they are often targets of discrimination within educational, workplace and health-care settings and are stigmatized as lazy, lacking self-discipline and unmotivated," says Lori Neighbors, Ph.D. '07, who conducted the research with Jeffery Sobal, Cornell professor of nutritional sociology in Cornell's College of Human Ecology.

These factors have led many people to be dissatisfied with their bodies, says Neighbors, now an assistant professor of nutrition at the University

of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

When the Cornell researchers assessed body weight versus the weight and shape individuals wish they had, they found that:

-- Men and women are similarly dissatisfied with their weight by an average of about 8 pounds, though women are much more dissatisfied with their bodies. Men have more mixed desires -- some want to lose weight while others want to gain weight.

-- Most of the normal-weight women who want to weigh less desire a weight still within the normal-weight range. However, 10 percent want to weigh what experts deem as officially underweight.

-- Half of the underweight women want to stay the same or lose weight. "The majority of underweight females, closer in body size to the thin cultural ideal, consider their body weight 'about right,'" said Sobal, even though experts have deemed these body weights unhealthful.

-- Overweight women want to weigh less. But about half want a body weight that would continue to make them overweight.

The findings suggest "that the idealized body weight and shape, especially among underweight females and overweight individuals of both genders, are not in accordance with population-based standards defining healthy body weight."

In a society in which excess weight is the norm, it's vital, say the researchers, to better understand body dissatisfaction and how this dissatisfaction impacts weight-management efforts.

"While both men and women express some degree of body dissatisfaction, a surprising proportion of people with less healthy body

weights -- underweight females and overweight individuals of both genders -- do not idealize a body weight that would move them to a more healthy state," said Neighbors.

Source: Cornell University

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