

Self-compassion key to positive body image and coping

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Women who accept and tolerate their imperfections appear to have a more positive body image despite their body mass index (BMI) and are better able to handle personal disappointments and setbacks in their daily lives.

Research out of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Waterloo found that this self-compassion might be an important means to increase positive [body image](#) and protect girls and young women against unhealthy [weight](#)-control practices and eating disorders.

"Women may experience a more positive body image and better eating habits if they approach disappointments and distress with kindness and the recognition that these struggles are a normal part of life," said Professor Allison Kelly of the Department of Psychology at Waterloo, and the study's lead author. "How we treat ourselves during difficult times that may seem unrelated to our bodies and eating seems to have a bearing on how we feel about our bodies and our relationship with food."

This study adds to the growing body of literature suggesting that self-compassion might offer unique benefits that self-esteem does not. Self-esteem comes from evaluating oneself as above average, and so may be limited in helping individuals cope with perceived shortcomings.

"Regardless of their weight, women with higher self-compassion have better body image and fewer concerns about weight, body shape or eating," said Professor Kelly. "There is something about a high level of

acceptance and understanding of oneself that helps people not necessarily view their bodies more positively, but rather acknowledge their bodies' imperfections and be okay with them."

The research results suggest that eating disorder prevention and health promotion that focus on increasing [young women](#)'s self-compassion may be an important way to foster healthier weight management across the BMI spectrum.

This study gathered data from 153 female undergraduate students and used BMI calculations based on each participant's self-reported height and weight. The research team administered a series of questionnaires assessing levels of self-compassion, [self-esteem](#), body image, and eating behaviours.

More information: The study appears in the September 2014 issue of the journal *Body Image* and is available at [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ... ii/S1740144514000813](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S1740144514000813)

Provided by University of Waterloo

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