Medical Xpress

How to help a friend with negative body image

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It's common to feel uncomfortable with different aspects of our bodies or to want to make small changes here and there. However, sometimes this dissatisfaction with our bodies can start to become a burden. Here

are some tips for helping a friend who may be struggling with negative body image and where to find support.

What is body image?

Body image describes the way that we see our physical bodies and how we imagine it looks to others. People with positive body image generally feel comfortable and confident in their bodies, while people with negative body image may feel ashamed, anxious or awkward about their bodies. It's important to keep in mind that our own body image may not always align with reality, as we may view our bodies in a distorted an inaccurate way.

Someone who is struggling with negative body image may:

- Make [negative comments](#) about their own size or shape.
- Weigh themselves often and feel upset about even slight weight gain.
- Obsess over their appearance or nitpick different aspects of their body.
- Try to conceal their body with loose or baggy clothing.
- Avoid of events that require wearing less clothing than they would like (e.g., swimming).
- Make ongoing efforts to lose weight, often through extreme dieting or intense exercise.

How can I support a friend with negative body image?

Negative body image, depending on how severe, can be a difficult issue to overcome. Here are some ways you can support a friend who may be experiencing [negative body image](#).

- Be honest. Talk openly with your friend, and let them know that you're there for them.
- Focus on other aspects. Remind your friend that you love them for who they are beyond their [physical appearance](link): how funny they are, how brave or smart they are, etc.
- Set an example. Practice self-acceptance and avoid making negative comments about your own body and others'.
- Be proactive. If you are concerned a friend might have poor body image or is showing signs of disordered eating, check out the resources below for additional information and support.
- Unfollow. Social media can impact our [self-esteem](link). If you or your friend follow accounts that are negatively impacting your body image, self-esteem or self-worth, unfollow them. Instead, seek out accounts that promote body positivity and self-love (there are a lot!).

It's important to allow your friend time to process and respond to conversations you have around [body image](link), especially if you're feeling concerned. Approaching you [friend](link) with compassion can go a long way.

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