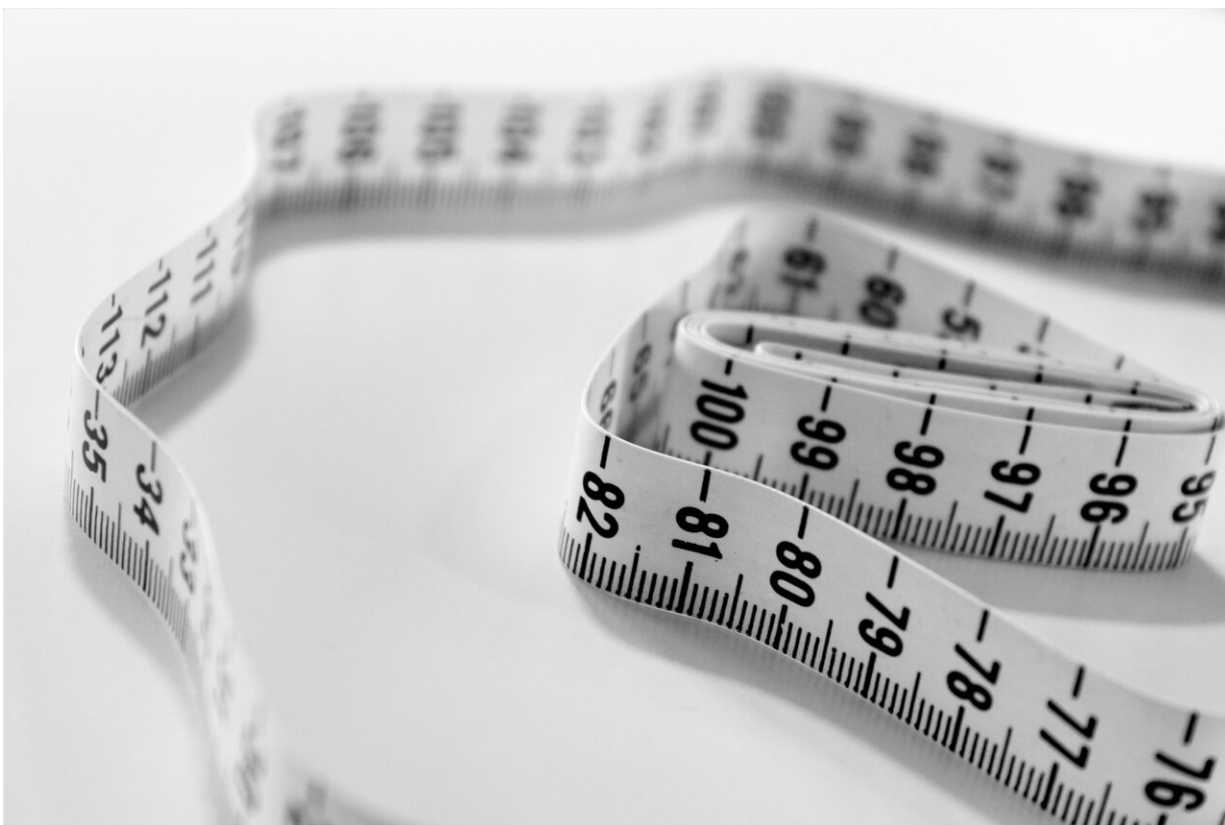


Compassion could be key to combating body shame

March 28 2023



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

University of Queensland researchers have found compassion could reduce self-criticism, body shaming and depression in overweight or obese adults.

Dr. James Kirby from UQ's School of Psychology trialed a 12-week compassion focused therapy program, to change how participants felt about and related to their bodies. The research is published in *Behavior Therapy*.

"Participants were encouraged to use friendly, validating and encouraging language instead of highly critical or attacking sentiments," Dr. Kirby said.

"It seems simple, yet we all fall into the trap of talking critically about ourselves to try to motivate change.

"However, this can severely impact [mental health](#) and well-being.

"The compassion therapy model provides people with the tools to develop a compassionate relationship with their bodies, regardless of weight, size or shape."

The research team found the program successfully reduced body weight shame and [self-criticism](#), increased [self-compassion](#), and 66% of participants showed a clinical improvement in depression.

Three months on participants reported continuing to use techniques such as "stopping the cycle" when they started to criticize themselves.

Dr. Kirby said people classified as overweight or obese are often shamed for the way they look, and as a result are more likely to experience depression or anxiety.

"In Western cultures, people's physical appearances are under intense scrutiny, particularly with the rise of social media," he said.

"Being exposed to relentless negative social perceptions about [body](#)

[weight](#), size and shape leaves many people feeling vulnerable and ashamed of how they look and how others see them."

Dr. Kirby said 2023 Australian of the Year Taryn Brumfitt was an important positive role model.

"It's encouraging that discussions around body image issues are being given a platform," he said. "If you feel ashamed about how you look and you feel depressed because of it, it's not your fault.

"Programs like [compassion](#) focused therapy might offer a possible pathway to help encourage a more supportive and validating self-relationship, and that could make all the difference."

More information: Alicia Carter et al, Compassion Focused Therapy to Reduce Body Weight Shame for Individuals with Obesity: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *Behavior Therapy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.beth.2023.02.001](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: Compassion could be key to combating body shame (2023, March 28) retrieved 22 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-03-compassion-key-combating-body-shame.html>

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