

# "Fitspiration" social media trend is actually detrimental to women's wellbeing

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Fitspiration – or fitspo for short – is a rising global movement within social media that encourages weight loss, healthy eating and exercise through inspirational fitness images and slogans.

Touted as promoting healthy lifestyles, the fitspo trend is now being

called into question by Flinders University researchers who suspect the overly sexualised, appearance-based messages dominating Facebook news feeds, Tumblr and Instagram accounts may be doing more harm than good for women's psychological wellbeing.

Led by behavioural psychologist Dr Ivanka Prichard, the researchers are about to begin a study of Australian women aged 17-29 to determine whether the new fit ideal conveyed through fitspirational media actually discourages women's exercise by negatively impacting mood and [body image](#).

"While the thin ideal is still prominent in women's fashion magazines and marketing, a new fit ideal is permeating through [social media](#)," Dr Prichard, based in the School of Health Sciences, said.

"The new fit ideal is heavily focused on appearance, with the implied message that women now need to be strong, fit and toned as well as skinny," she said.

"Some fitspos can be really encouraging, for example 'healthy is the new skinny', but others, such as 'fat is your sweat crying', are not just bizarre; they may have serious negative consequences in terms of [body dissatisfaction](#), disordered eating and exercise behaviour.

"A small amount of research has emerged demonstrating the negative impact of viewing ultra-fit images on depression and anxiety but it remains unknown what impact these images have on actual levels of exercise participation."

Dr Prichard said previous research has shown exercising for appearance-based reasons is associated with [body image concerns](#). Given the recognised link between body dissatisfaction and exercise participation, she said it is important to test whether the new fit ideal actually promotes

physical activity, as intended, or has the opposite effect.

"Fitspirational messages feature overly sexualised women with bodies that the vast majority of women will never be able to obtain or maintain, making them feel bad when they don't match up to these ideals.

"We suspect that viewing fitness pages will result in greater body dissatisfaction, mood disturbance and lower levels of exercise participation among young women due to the appearance-focused nature of these popular fitness images.

"The level of body dissatisfaction and exercise participation will likely depend on the amount and frequency of images young women are exposed to on their social media feeds, and how close or far they are from achieving these bodies.

"If they are further away from the fit ideal, they will probably feel worse."

The research team includes body image expert Professor Marika Tiggemann; Sport, Health and Physical Education (SHAPE) Research Centre Director Professor Murray Drummond; and public health specialist Associate Professor Claire Drummond.

A recent study by Associate Professor Drummond revealed that teenage girls were becoming increasingly disengaged in school sports activities because social media was making them feel self-conscious about their bodies.

**More information:** Women aged 17-29 who follow social media fitness pages can participate in the study by contacting Dr Ivanka Prichard: [ivanka.prichard@flinders.edu.au](mailto:ivanka.prichard@flinders.edu.au)

Provided by Flinders University

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