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# Body Image & Eating Disorders

## A Student Wellness Guide

**Includes:** Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

### Body Image & Eating Disorders: A Student Wellness Guide

**Defining Body Image and Its Implications**

A teen's body image is shaped by how they perceive their own appearance, as well as how they think others see them. This perception can be heavily influenced by social media, peer commentary, and cultural ideals that emphasize a specific "perfect" body type. When body image becomes distorted, it can lead to low self-esteem, withdrawal from social activities, or excessive focus on weight or shape. For students navigating already challenging academic and social environments, the added stress of negative body image can be overwhelming. It's crucial to acknowledge that healthy bodies come in all shapes, sizes, and weights.

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## Defining Body Image and Its Implications

A teen's body image is shaped by how they perceive their own appearance, as well as how they think others see them. This perception can be heavily influenced by social media, peer commentary, and cultural ideals that emphasize a specific "perfect" body type. When body image becomes distorted, it can lead to low self-esteem, withdrawal from social activities, or excessive focus on weight or shape. For students navigating already challenging academic and social environments, the added stress of negative body image can be overwhelming. It's crucial to acknowledge that healthy bodies come in all shapes, sizes, and weights. Genetics, lifestyle, and personal preferences all play roles in determining an individual's unique body composition. When the focus shifts to what the body can do rather than merely how it looks, teens may find greater acceptance of themselves. Engaging in physical activities for enjoyment or striving for personal fitness goals can build positive self-image. On the other hand, constantly comparing oneself to edited photos on social media often results in dissatisfaction, fueling a cycle of unhealthy behaviors like restrictive eating or overexercising.

## Common Eating Disorders and Warning Signs

Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder are three prominent eating disorders that can significantly impact a teen's health. Anorexia typically involves severe calorie restriction due to intense fear of weight gain. Bulimia is characterized by cycles of binging on large amounts of food, followed by behaviors to prevent weight gain, such as self-induced vomiting. Binge eating disorder entails recurrent overeating episodes without purging. Each carries both physical risks (ranging from malnutrition to electrolyte imbalances) and psychological challenges like anxiety, shame, or depression. Warning signs can vary. A person might start

skipping meals, becoming extremely fixated on calorie counts, or making negative remarks about their body shape. They could also engage in secretive behavior around food or display drastic weight fluctuations. Emotional changes, such as increased irritability or extreme mood swings, often accompany these patterns. Early intervention improves the likelihood of successful treatment, so recognizing these signs in oneself or a friend is vital.

**Media and Peer Influence on Self-Perception**

The media and peer environments can either promote body positivity or exacerbate body dissatisfaction. Teens scrolling through social platforms can easily encounter images that have been filtered or photoshopped. These unrealistic standards suggest everyone else is "perfect," intensifying insecurities. Peer pressure adds another layer: casual jokes about weight or offhand remarks comparing bodies in the locker room can erode self-esteem, especially in vulnerable individuals. However, the rise of body-positive movements offers an alternative. Accounts celebrating diverse body types and holistic health can serve as uplifting platforms. Surrounding yourself with friends and online communities that embrace uniqueness helps foster a healthier outlook. If faced with negative or toxic influences, limiting exposure, such as unfollowing certain accounts or addressing insensitive comments, can make a real difference. Ultimately, cultivating self-compassion and recognizing that everyone's body journey is different go a long way toward establishing a positive self-perception.

**Healthy Coping Strategies and Resources**

Developing sustainable coping mechanisms is essential for those struggling with body image or at risk of eating disorders. Therapy—especially cognitive-behavioral therapy—can help individuals challenge negative thought patterns and reshape their relationship with food. Nutritional counseling provides personalized guidance, teaching balanced eating habits without extremes. Self-help strategies might include journaling about achievements unrelated to physical appearance or practicing mindful eating that encourages tuning in to hunger and fullness cues. Support networks also matter. Confiding in trusted friends, family members, or school counselors can offer emotional relief and practical help. The journey to recovery often involves setbacks and patience. Social support can ease the burden of shame and isolation that frequently accompanies disordered eating. When needed, medical

intervention might be necessary for stabilizing physical health—particularly in cases of severe malnutrition or dangerous behaviors. Timely action is key, underscoring why recognizing warning signs early and seeking appropriate care can truly be life-saving.

**Key Information: Body Image & Eating Disorder Awareness Table**

| Topic | Signs or Factors | Possible Actions |
|---|---|---|
| Negative Body Image | Excessive self-criticism, comparing to ideals | Seek supportive social circles, limit toxic media |
| Anorexia Nervosa | Extreme dieting, fear of weight gain | Engage in therapy, monitor nutritional intake |
| Bulimia Nervosa | Binging followed by purging behaviors | Consult mental health professional, use coping strategies |
| Binge Eating Disorder | Recurring overeating without purging | Identify emotional triggers, develop healthier outlets |

**Case Study Excerpt**

**Marisol was a bright student who thrived in art club but felt insecure about her weight. She followed countless fitness influencers on social media, many of whom promoted drastic diets. Eager to fit a certain "ideal," Marisol began skipping meals and exercising obsessively. Friends noticed she was often fatigued, constantly making self-critical comments, and avoiding social events that involved food. Eventually, Marisol fainted after an intense workout. Terrified by this wake-up call, she confided in a trusted teacher, who directed her to the school counselor. With professional help, Marisol learned that her distorted body image stemmed from comparing herself to unrealistic standards and feeling pressured to be perfect in every aspect of life. Over weeks of therapy, she developed healthier eating patterns and discovered positive ways to handle stress—such as painting and yoga. Unfollowing the extreme diet influencers further eased her anxiety. By focusing on her creativity and appreciating her body's strengths, Marisol gradually reclaimed both her physical and emotional health. She realized the "perfect body" she pursued online was not only unattainable but also dangerous to her well-being.**

1. What societal pressures fueled Marisol's negative body image?

2. Which steps helped her recover a healthier relationship with food and body perception?

**Multiple Choice**

1. Anorexia nervosa often involves:

    a) Occasional binges followed by purging

    b) Eating normal amounts of food without any concern about weight gain

    c) Severe restriction of calories due to intense weight gain fears

    d) Excessive water consumption but balanced meals

2. One effective strategy for coping with negative body image is:

    a) Following more extreme diet influencers

    b) Limiting exposure to toxic media and practicing self-compassion

    c) Avoiding any professional or social support

    d) Engaging in secretive dieting to test your willpower and see results

3. Media can contribute to poor body image by:

    a) Offering genuine medical advice without disclaimers

    b) Discouraging comparison and promoting a healthy sense of personal growth

    c) Showcasing heavily edited images that set unrealistic beauty standards

    d) Always presenting realistic, unedited photos

**Matching**

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| 1. ___ Bulimia Nervosa | A) Severe limitation of food intake due to fear of weight gain |
| 2. ___ Body Positivity | B) Bingeing followed by purging behaviors |
| 3. ___ Anorexia Nervosa | C) Involves recurrent overeating without compensatory purging |
| 4. ___ Binge Eating Disorder | D) Helps individuals reframe negative thoughts and behaviors |
| 5. ___ Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy | E) Movement advocating acceptance of diverse body types |

**Fill-in-the-Blank**

1. _____ can arise when someone constantly compares themselves to idealized images on social media.

2. _____ often includes an unhealthy cycle of bingeing and purging.

3. _____ teaches healthier thought patterns and coping mechanisms for those struggling with body image.

**Short Answer**

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Why is it important for teens to seek help early if they suspect an eating disorder?

_____

_____

_____

2. How can peers and family support someone working to improve their body image or recover from disordered eating?

3. What role do healthy coping strategies like journaling or creative outlets play in dealing with body image issues?