



Self-Worth - Body Image and Social Media

Social media and body image

Social media can be a great tool when used responsibly. It allows us to stay connected with the people who matter to us and can open up our world to new thoughts, ideas and people. We can stay informed about world news and share things that matter to us on our own social media platforms. However, the pressure of trying to look good, be interesting and appear successful can cause feelings of low self-worth in even the most popular of social media users.

Body image is how you see yourself, how you think and feel about the way you look, and how you think other people may perceive you. Body image is easily influenced by social media. While magazines and other visual media were once the most powerful external factor affecting body image, social media has rapidly climbed the ladder to join them. In the *Insights in Body Esteem* report, published by the Butterfly Foundation, more than 40 per cent of respondents admitted comparing themselves to others on social media, with nearly 40 per cent wishing they looked just like the people they saw there.

No true reflection of reality

Unfortunately, social media has been found to have addictive properties for some people and personality types and it can be a manipulative environment. Some people choose to share a vision of their life on social media that doesn't necessarily reflect reality. As Dr Lars Madsen, clinical advisor to The MindShift Foundation notes, 'Social media – such as Facebook and Instagram – allows for easy social comparisons that can result in people feeling envious and less than positive about themselves.' When faced with a lifestyle that we can't compete with, social media can damage self-worth and play havoc with body image.

Signs that social media is affecting body image

There are indications that social media is affecting body image and self-worth, such as:

- Feeling envious of other people's lives
- Measuring our own worth depending on what we see on social media
- Trying to obsessively recreate 'looks' we've seen online
- Feeling bad when we're unable to afford what we see online
- Can't put our phone down for fear of missing out on the next new thing
- Moods are affected after being on social media
- Being alone and off a device is difficult.



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Digital addiction to social media

An addiction to social media can fuel body image issues. Having easy access to devices like smartphones can have social media accessible at the touch of a button. With prolonged use, social media usage can become second nature and opening the applications can be an unconscious act. Consider these statements about digital addiction to the digital world.

- I spend more time on my device than I expect in a session.
- I prefer being online more than I do being around other people.
- I'd rather be online than doing anything else when I'm at home.
- The first thing I do in the morning is look at my device.
- My family complains about how much time I spend on my device or computer.
- I rush other tasks because I spend too much time on my device or computer.
- I will browse the internet or social media instead of work in a productive fashion.
- I don't like being bothered when I'm on my device or computer.
- I will take my device to the dinner table, the bathroom, everywhere.
- My life would be less interesting without the internet.
- I lose track of time when I'm on the internet.
- I wonder what I'm missing out on when I'm not online.
- I regularly check social media to see what friends and family are up to.
- I sometimes check my partner's social media profiles more than necessary.
- I sometimes feel anxious or upset after I spend time on social media.
- I sometimes feel ashamed if I spend too much time online.
- I stay up later at night because I'm browsing online.
- I've progressively increased my internet usage over the last five years.
- I can't imagine my life without the internet.
- I don't like being separated from my device.

If you find yourself aligning with these statements, then it might be worthwhile thinking about how much time you devote to social media. If you know that your body image is suffering because of what you've seen on social media, then perhaps it's time to think about reducing your online presence.

Digital detox from social media

One of the simple ways a person can remove themselves from the influence of social media is to not use it. However, that's not necessarily practical. Being disconnected from family and friends may lead to loneliness and isolation. Minimising exposure to social media can help manage a person's digital life for better mental health. Some ways to detox from the digital world might be:



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- Disable notifications
- Switch to airplane mode or do not disturb
- Delete apps you don't use
- Set your screen's colour scheme to black and white and make your phone seem unappealing with a monochromatic display
- Don't take your devices into your bedroom
- Set a browsing time and stick to it
- Find your social media fix in real life and meet friends in person
- Put your phone away
- Update your privacy settings
- You don't need to be 'on' all the time
- Fight the temptation – go for a walk or do something else.

What is healthy body image?

Healthy body image occurs when a person is able to accept, appreciate and respect their body. Healthy body image is important because it is a protective factor that contributes to a person being more resilient to some mental health problems. Building self-worth and healthy body image may require a balanced approach to nutrition and physical activity.

A healthy body image will improve:

- **Self-worth.** This can infiltrate every aspect of life and contributes to happiness and wellbeing.
- **Self-acceptance.** A person with self-acceptance is less likely to feel pressured by unrealistic images in the media.
- **Healthy outlook and behaviours.** It is easier to lead a balanced lifestyle with healthy attitudes and practices relating to food and exercise when you don't expose yourself to unrealistic expectations.

Working towards healthy body image can lessen the impact of unrealistic images found on social media. In feeling worthy within ourselves, we don't need social media to heighten those feelings.

How can you improve your body image?

The best place to start countering negative thoughts on your image is with yourself. Overcoming body dissatisfaction, essentially, is about developing *body acceptance*.



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This can involve doing the following:

- Focusing on your positive qualities, skills and talents to better appreciate your whole self.
- Say positive things to yourself every day.
- Avoid negative self-talk.
- Focus on appreciating and respecting what your body can do will help you to feel more positive about it.
- Setting positive, health-focussed goals rather than drastic weight loss goals is more beneficial for your overall wellbeing.
- Admiring others can improve your own body confidence but it is important to appreciate your own beauty. Avoid comparing yourself to others, accept yourself as a whole and remember that everyone is unique. Our differences are what make us special.
- Remember that many images you see in the media are unrealistic and represent a minority of the population.
- Keep social media usage to the joy of connecting with friends and family.

Social media can have a powerful effect on body image, so it's up to each individual to know their limits.

Where to get help

Always remember you are not alone. Your doctor or registered health professionals are there to help you.

Our online resource page also has a full list of organisations where you can get further information. <http://mindshift.org.au/suggested-links/>.

Things to remember

Social media is a great tool when used responsibly, but it's rife with unrealistic and manipulative images. Body acceptance means challenging the perception that you need to look a particular way and be a particular weight.

In Summary

Dr Lars Madsen confirms that social media in conjunction with body dissatisfaction are a common cause of low self-worth. At the heart of body image problems are unhelpful media manipulations. Allowing social media to control how we see ourselves and others can lead to comparison envy. Once



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these beliefs are formed, if they are not questioned or challenged, you run the risk of developing negative body image that can contribute to reducing your self-worth.

Taking steps to counter negative body image can include disconnecting from social media and challenging what you see online. Setting safe goals such as leading a healthy lifestyle, achieving healthy body weight, talking to someone you trust or seeking professional help are great starting points.

Updates and Further information

For the latest updates and further information please visit www.mindshift.org.au.

Our Mission

It is our mission to ensure that every person has access to the resources available to build healthy self-worth, to have a positive sense of self and to find meaning in life.

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