

# Ask the Expert: 3 Common Questions About Body Image

Recorded: February 2, 2026  
Transcript

*Dr. Keisha Godin:* I'm here to answer your top questions about body image. What is body image? Body image is actually more than whether I like my body. Body image includes thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviours I have about my physical appearance, but also my body's functionality, like what my body can do.

How do I like my body? Our bodies are important to our sense of self-worth. The problem becomes when we place too much emphasis on our bodies, when we're evaluating our sense of self-worth. And there's lots of ways that we do this, that might be dieting to try to change our bodies, and might also be checking behaviours like pinching, pressing, poking, spending a long time staring in the mirror or comparing myself to other people. It might also look like avoidance. I'm avoiding going out with friends because I don't want them to see what I look like in different outfits, or I'm avoiding looking in mirrors or only wearing baggy clothes.

So, one thing we can do to like our bodies more are actually remind ourselves of other value domains. We can think about the fact that you're so much more than just a body floating around. You're a friend, a coworker, a parent, and invest in other value domains that remind you that your self-worth is made up of lots of things that include your body, but aren't only your body. You might also be mindful of the thoughts that you're having. If I have a thought like "I hate my flabby arms," I catch it and replace it with something more neutral, like "I have arms that lift and reach."

Will losing weight improve my body image? This is a really commonly held belief, and research shows that some weight loss, like 5% to 15%, is associated with improvements in body satisfaction. But what's interesting is that we don't see increased satisfaction with more weight loss. So, it's not like if you lose more weight, you'd like your body more.

So, what we recommend instead is engaging in cognitive and behavioural skills so that reframing of thoughts and monitoring those behaviours, like checking or avoidance and trying to reduce those, those actually have similar outcomes to when people lose weight, but they're longer lasting and less precarious because it doesn't depend on weight loss.

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