

# Learning to Accept Your Body

It can be hard to be overweight. You may feel uneasy about yourself around others. You may hate to be in situations that could draw attention to your size. You may get teased about your weight. People may say cruel things about your weight. You may worry about what others are thinking about you. If any of these things has ever happened to you, you are not alone.

Learning to feel OK about your body is really important. It will help you be more active. It will help you have more fun. And it's possible. Even if you are overweight. Even if you are trying to lose weight.

## Who's in charge of how you should feel about your appearance? You or the advertising folks?

The advertisers if they have their way. Advertisers have a big effect on how we think. The message in the ads is clear. *Thin is good, heavy is bad.* But it goes beyond that. They say, "People who are thin are happier. They are healthier. They are more popular, sexier, and more successful in life. If you can just be thin, all your troubles are over."

Just think about the ads you see on television or in magazines. The message jumps right out at you: being thin is the answer to all life's problems.

Of course, it's a lie. Actually, there are two lies. The first lie is that most of what you see isn't real. Models spend hours working out with

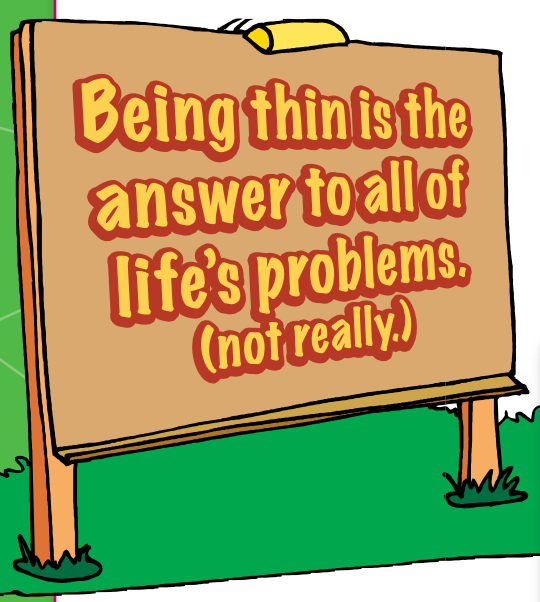
**KEY GOALS**

**Feeling positive about your body will help you make progress on your 4 key goals:**

- ⊙ Limit RED foods
- ⊙ Increase GREEN activity
- ⊙ Hold Family Meetings
- ⊙ Keep Track of Weight

personal trainers. They often do unhealthy things to look the way they do. Then experts use computers to retouch their pictures. That's the first lie. These people aren't what they seem to be. Nobody is that perfect.

The second lie is even worse. Being thin doesn't bring any of those things they promise. It's a big fraud. The truth is that how people live their lives determines how happy, healthy, popular, sexy, and successful



**Here's what you'll learn about in this module:**

- ▶ How the media may shape your feelings about your body
- ▶ How to tell if your feelings about your body limit what you do
- ▶ Finding qualities to like about your body and yourself



they will be. That's how it works for thin people. That's also how it works for heavy people, for short people, and tall people.

So you have to decide. Just who's going to be in charge of how you feel about your appearance? You or the advertising media? We hope you decide it's you.

don't have to let this happen to you. You can find things to like about your body. You can learn to feel OK about your body. You can feel OK even if you are trying to lose weight.

Most people would like to change something about their bodies. But they don't let that keep them from doing things. They don't let it keep them from being with other people.

- ▶ When you accept your body, you are more likely to do things. You are more likely to be active. You are more likely to try new things. You are more likely to enjoy being with people in public.
- ▶ When you feel bad about your body, you are less likely to be active. You are less likely to try certain activities. You may avoid people. You don't want to be around people who will notice you.
- ▶ Feeling OK about your body helps you like yourself. It helps you feel good about yourself. It plays a big role in your sense of who you are.

### **There's more to your appearance than just your size . . .**

People may admire your smile. They may like your confident posture. Or your energy. Your sense of humor. How clean and neat you are. They may admire what your body is able to do. Has this happened to you? These qualities usually make

**Don't let your image of your body limit who you are. Don't let it limit what you do.**

much more of an impression on people than size and shape. So ask yourself: *What are the positive qualities about my appearance? What should I feel good about?* Make a list of these qualities. They will help you feel better about yourself.

What do you like about the way your body can do things? Do you have some athletic skills? If not, are there skills you could learn? Is your body healthy? Do you take care of your body's health? How do you present yourself?

### **. . . and there's more to you than just your appearance.**

Your positive qualities make you who you are, not your looks. Qualities like your friendliness. Your loyalty to friends. Your sense of humor. The way you use your mind. Your caring for others. The way you do the right thing. Your interests. Your cheerfulness and your honesty. These are what make you who you are.

Qualities like these are what others value most in you. These are qualities you can value highly in yourself. Aren't these some of the qualities you look



### **Don't let your image of your body limit who you are. Don't let it limit what you do.**

People with the same body size and shape can feel very differently about their bodies. It's true. How you feel about your body is a personal experience. There aren't any rules that say you should feel bad about your body when you reach a certain weight.

Many people are afraid to do some activities in public. They worry about how they look. They often give in to these concerns. Then they miss out on a lot of fun.

It isn't good to worry about the size, shape, or weight of your body. You just become more critical of yourself. But you

for in your friends? Aren't these more important to you than how much your friend weighs?

Take a few minutes and ask yourself: *What are the qualities about me that I feel good about? What do my friends admire in me?* Make these qualities part of your positive self-image.

Your positive qualities make you who you are, not your looks.

KEY QUESTION

**How do my feelings about my body affect what I do? Or what I don't let myself do? How can I tell? Is this OK with me?**

How can you tell whether or not you are limiting what you do because of your body image? There are some questions in the Help Sheets you can ask yourself. Do I avoid:

- ▶ Looking at my reflection in a mirror?
- ▶ Looking at myself in pictures?
- ▶ Physical activity that might call attention to my shape or weight, like dancing, aerobics, or playing sports?
- ▶ Physical contact and hugs because I might show others how large my body feels?

Tyrone looked over the list of things that people with a poor body image often avoid. He was surprised to see all the situations he avoided. There were a lot of them.

Tyrone avoided dancing. He thought he looked heavy. He felt clumsy. He also avoided social situations where food would be served. He was embarrassed to eat RED foods around others who knew he was trying to eat healthy. He was also embarrassed to eat healthy when others were eating what they wanted. He didn't want people to see him eat and think about how much he weighed. He also learned that he didn't like to be in pictures or to look at himself in a mirror.

He saw that his body image was limiting what he let himself do. He was missing out on a lot of things. He felt pretty bad. Then he talked to his father about what he could do.

Tyrone's father explained that he had a choice. He could continue to limit himself by feeling bad about how he looked. Or he could take some risks. He could try new activities that he would probably enjoy if he gave himself a chance.

Tyrone objected. He said that people would make fun of him for being heavy. "No, they won't," said his father. "Why do you think they are your friends, because of the way you look?" Tyrone said they are his friends because they like him.

"So what do your friends like about you?" his father asked.

After thinking about it, Tyrone made a long list of qualities. He included his smile, his cheerfulness, and his willingness to help others. His father pointed out that Tyrone was also a good listener. He was always willing to help someone else. Then he said, "These are the reasons people like you. These are what people see when you enter the room."

That made sense to Tyrone, and he decided to take some risks. He would begin to socialize even when there was food around. He could tell his close friends how he was trying to manage his eating and ask them to encourage him.

He would worry about learning how to dance later. "This is a great start," his father said.

What would you like to say to Tyrone?

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If you were in Tyrone's situation, what would you want to do?

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## What you can do . . .

When you think about your body, focus on:

- ▶ Positive qualities about your body
- ▶ Positive qualities that make you who you really are

- ▶ Places where much of my body is exposed, like the pool, the beach, and public dressing rooms or showers?
- ▶ Social functions where people can see me eat?
- ▶ Wearing clothes that might reveal my body's shape or size?

**SPECIAL FOCUS** →

## What can I do to help me feel better about my body? How can I feel good about myself and do more things that I like to do?

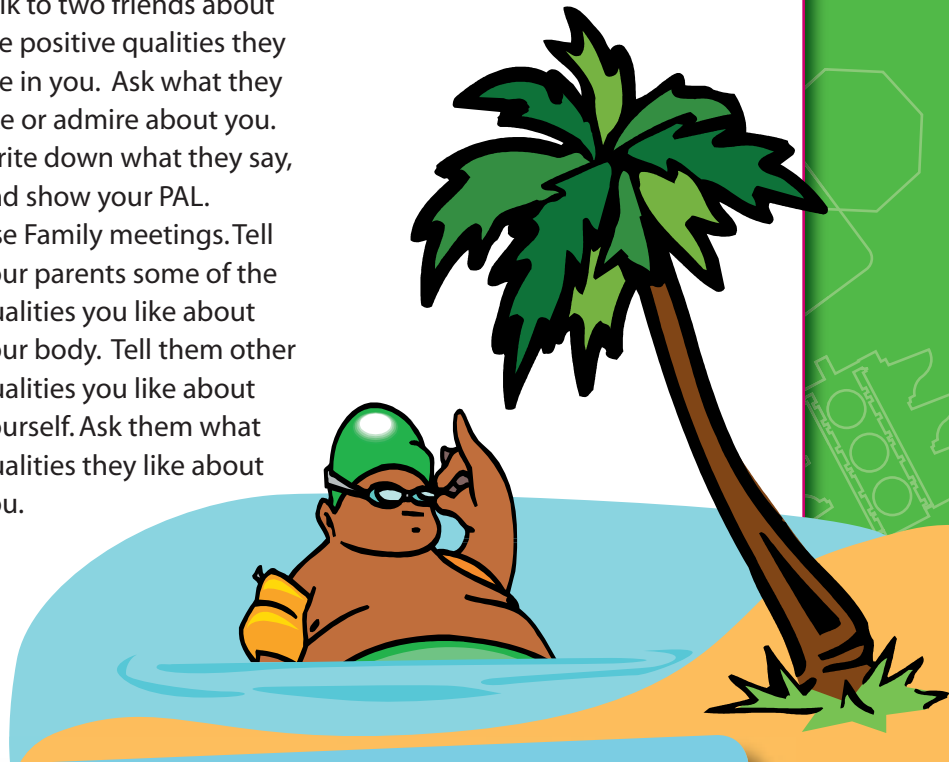
If you answer, "Yes," to many of these, you are letting some negative feelings about your body limit what you do. You are limiting the fun you could have doing more activities with friends.

If so, ask yourself: *Is this OK with me? Do I want to continue to feel this way about my body? Am I willing to try to accept my body? Do I want to continue to limit what I do? Or would I like to accept my body more? Would I like to try things that will let me have fun in other ways? Will I try some things that I would like to do even if I am not 100% comfortable?*

- ▶ Talk to two friends about the positive qualities they see in you. Ask what they like or admire about you. Write down what they say, and show your PAL.
- ▶ Use Family meetings. Tell your parents some of the qualities you like about your body. Tell them other qualities you like about yourself. Ask them what qualities they like about you.

## Skills and Goals for feeling positive about my body

- ▶ Learn how the media shapes how I feel about my body.
- ▶ Identify ways my feelings about my body limit me.
- ▶ Find qualities to like about my body and myself.
- ▶ Learn what others like about me.



*Notes to myself—some things I want to keep in mind this week:*

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# Learning to Accept Your Body

## Focus On Your Positives

*In the first column, write down what qualities best describe you as a person. What would your best friends say? Talking to them will help you get support from others. Write down what they say in the second column.*

Qualities that describe me:	Qualities my friends say describe me:

Which of these qualities make you feel good about yourself?

Which of these qualities do your friends say they value?

What kind of qualities do you value in friends?

## Focus On Your Positives (continued)

*If your best friend had a body like yours—heavier than she would like—would it make a difference to you? Would you not want to be her friend anymore? Would you like her less? Would you respect her less? Why? Do you like her now because of her size?*

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*What qualities are more important than shape, size, and weight in selecting a friend? Would you take “being thin” over these qualities? Why?*

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*What have you learned about your own body image?*

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## Does Your Body Image Limit You?

*How often do you avoid doing things because of your body image? Here are some behaviors commonly avoided by people because of thoughts or feelings about their bodies. How often do you avoid any of them? Write down the number that best fits how often you avoid each behavior.*

0=Almost Never or Never      1=Sometimes      2=Often      3=Almost Always or Always

*How often do I avoid...*

- Looking at my reflection in a mirror or a picture
- Physical activity that might call attention to my shape or weight, such as dancing, exercising, or playing recreational sports
- Physical contact and hugs because I might show others how my body feels
- Places where much of my body is exposed, like the pool, the beach, and public dressing rooms, or showers
- Social functions where people could see me eat
- Wearing clothes that might reveal my body's shape or size
- Weighing myself because I am uncomfortable with my weight

*Which of these things would you most like to change?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

# Learning to Accept Your Body

## Expose the Media Messages

*Find images in the media that tell you how you should look if you want to be successful. Cut them out. If they are on TV, write down a brief description of them. Write down what's not real about them and the messages they are sending. Talk about these images with your parents at a family meeting and show them to your PAL.*

The Image	The Lie About What's Real	The Message

## Battle Back With the Truth

*What's the truth about weight and happiness?*

*What's the truth about weight and success in life?*

*What would you like to say to the people who make the ads?*



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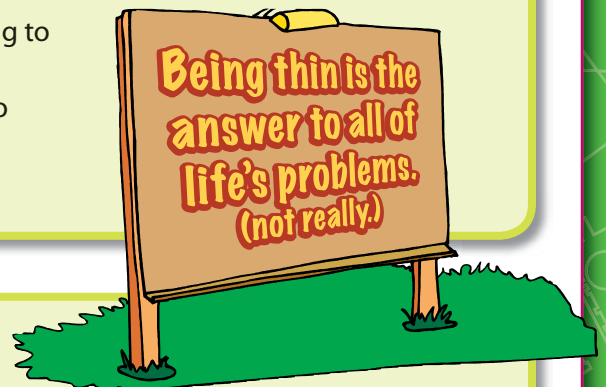
## Who's in charge of how you should feel about your appearance? You or the advertising folks?

- ▶ The message in the ads is clear. If you can just be thin, all your troubles are over.
- ▶ But it's a lie. How you live your life determines how happy you will be.



## Don't let your image of your body limit you.

- ▶ There aren't any rules that say you should feel bad about your body when you reach a certain weight.
- ▶ People with the same body size and shape can feel very differently about their bodies.
- ▶ Accepting your body helps you like yourself.
- ▶ You can feel OK about your body even if you are trying to lose weight.
- ▶ When you accept your body, you are more likely to do things in public.



## When you think about your body, focus on:

- ▶ Positive qualities about your body.
- ▶ Positive qualities that make you who you are.

Qualities like these are what others value most in you. Think of someone you like to be around who is not especially nice looking. What about her makes you like being around her? What do you admire about her?