

Body image is defined as a person's perception of their physical appearance or sexual attractiveness of their own body.

Body image is greatly valued in our world today. Though a healthy body is good, for many people, physical health and beauty becomes an obsession. The quest to reach a physical standard created by the world can be devastating. Men and women alike struggle to find worth, acceptance, and approval in their own self-image rather than finding their worth in who God created them to be. God created humans to reflect His image and find value in His purpose for their lives.

Common Characteristics

Common areas of life that get out of balance when a person is obsessed with body image include:

- **Food-focused:** Do you regularly restrict food or have binge eating habits? Are you hyper-sensitive about what you can/cannot eat? Do you consistently count calories? Do you carry guilt and shame about your intake of "good" and "bad" foods? Are you sometimes ashamed to eat around others?
- **Prone to fads:** Are you continuously trying the newest diet or workout as a form of hope or security?
- **Constant comparison:** Do you feel negative or positive about yourself because of how your body compares to others or to a certain weight on a scale? Do you regularly want to look like someone else and find fault in your appearance? If possible, would you trade bodies with someone else?
- **Schedule dictated by appearance:** Is life scheduled around workouts, or do you get anxious when you miss a workout? Do you turn down social invitations because of your physical appearance?
- **How you feel is influenced by how you look to others:** If you don't look good to others, or go unnoticed, is it hard to feel good/right about yourself? Are you controlled by others' perceptions of you? Does your self-confidence (or lack thereof) depend on how you look?
- **Mirror obsession or avoidance:** Do you constantly look in the mirror, or avoid mirrors all together?
- **Self-worth is measured by your appearance:** Are you hyper-critical of yourself, often putting yourself down because your looks? Does improving yourself mean looking better tomorrow than you do today? Do you think that life would improve, that you would matter more, if you looked better? Do you feel most valuable when others notice you?

Self-sufficiency, managing others' perceptions, good health, and looking beautiful *cannot fix the underlying problems driving a preoccupation with body image*. At its core, this is a spiritual struggle. Trying to solve spiritual problems with physical solutions only leads to pain, isolation, loneliness, addiction, and defeat. To heal, you must turn your focus to God and let Him heal the spiritual problem.

Biblical Insights

You are marvelously created in God's image: Humans are unique and distinct from the rest of creation.

- "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27)
"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well." (Psalm 139:13-14)

Your body belongs to God. You are its caretaker, not its owner. God wants you to exalt Him with your body, not exalt yourself.

- "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Spiritual health is more valuable than physical health. Imperishable beauty comes from the heart: Your physical body will fail you, God will not.

- "... Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:7-8)
- "Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." (1 Peter 3:3-4)

Physical beauty can be an idol. God shares his glory with none. You were made to worship God alone. Worshiping the created above the Creator or seeking self-glory will lead to destruction.

- "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man...Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator..." (Romans 1:22-25)
- "Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground..." (Ezekiel 28:17, describing the fall of Satan who was an angel)
- "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10)

Personal strength cannot overcome your fleshly desires. Only Christ can transform you. When you accept Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in you. By the power of the Spirit, you can live in freedom. You deeply matter to God. He has a plan for you.

- "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord." (Jeremiah 17:5)
- "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)
- "So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16)
- "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

Next Steps

- Ask Christ to heal you. Worship God by glorifying Him with your body (Romans 10:13, 12:1)
- The next time you feel controlled by how you look, stop, pray to God. Ask God to remind you that He created you for His glory. Identify/address any underlying causes with this struggle. (Isaiah 43:7)
- Find a place where you can talk without fear of judgment, like a re:generation recovery group. Confess, bring this sin to the light, be healed. (1 John 1:7-9, James 5:16)
- Prepare for vulnerable situations. Identify stressors that cause you to struggle and decide in advance how you will respond when temptation comes. (1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Peter 5:8, 1 Peter 4:1-2)
- Don't despair when you fail. Cry out to Jesus. God's grace and love are unconditional. (Romans 8:1)
- Body Image often goes hand in hand with insecurities, and depression. Read over the Depression Issue Sheet for more information.

God loves you. If you haven't experienced freedom in Christ, visit regenerationrecovery.org/freedom.

Additional Resources

- For stories of hope, go to www.watermark.org/dallas/ministries/regeneration-recovery: Jen-Bulimia, Ashley-Disordered Eating, Stephanie-Beauty and Perfection, Colton-Insecurity, John-Food.
- www.gotquestions.org/physical-appearance.html, Should I Care about my Appearance?
- www.desiringgod.org/articles/beware-the-mirror, Beware of the Mirror.
- www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-epidemic-of-male-body-hatred, The Epidemic of Male Body Hatred
- **Books:** Who Calls Me Beautiful: Finding Our True Image in the Mirror of God - Regina Franklin; Wanting to Be Her: Body Image Secrets Victoria Won't Tell You - Michelle Graham