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Men and body image issues ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am a male, 24 years old, height 5'10", and currently I weigh 143 lbs... When I was 17 or so, I weighed a hefty 190 lbs... at that time, that really had a negative effect on my self image, and now at 143, I still don't think I'm thin enough... I have lost all my weight 100 percent through diet and running about 20 miles/week... but I don't eat enough and I always worry before I leave home if I "look ok"? Do I have serious issues?!?

Thanks,
M

Answer

Dear M,

You're not alone ? almost everyone struggles with self or body image at some point, and occasionally worrying about how you look is completely normal. However, if you find yourself constantly thinking about food, your body shape and size, or your appearance, and these thoughts get in the way of work or school, your emotional well-being, or your social life, you may have a more complex body image and/or eating issue.

It may be tricky to distinguish between a healthy diet and exercise routine and habits and behaviors that could be detrimental to your health. For example, restricting calorie intake and engaging in exercise are common elements of a weight loss diet, which is healthy and normal for individuals who have too much body fat. However, if you're exercising or restricting calories so much so that your emotional and/or physical health suffers, you might be experiencing a more serious issue that requires more attention. If any of this rings true, a good place to start would be to meet with your healthcare provider or a counselor for proper assessment.

A common misconception is that body image issues and disordered eating only affects women. That's simply not true. Men also experience varying degrees of body image disturbances, eating disorders, and other related issues just as women do. Many men keep these concerns secret, but estimates from the [National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders](#) [2] suggest that as many as ten percent of those with eating disorders identify as male. Because men are less likely than women to disclose their disordered eating or exercise routines to their friends, loved ones, and doctors, diagnosis and treatment are often delayed. All this to say, reaching out was a brave thing to do!

Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet is essential in making sure you're getting all of the nutrients you need, including an appropriate number of calories. A balanced diet includes foods from all of the different food groups, and eating at least three meals a day. A balanced diet should not include too much sugar or fat, although some fat is necessary in any diet. For more information about the food groups and to help figure out how much you should be eating, check out the [United States Department of Agriculture's guidelines](#) [3].

Since you're already wondering if your eating and exercise habits may be an issue, it's a good idea to talk to someone about food and body image to be sure you're on track for a healthy relationship with food and exercise. You can start by discussing your concerns with a health care provider or a counselor.

You took a big step in inquiring about these issues, and that isn't easy. You deserve to start feeling better about your weight and body image ? hopefully some of this information will get you moving in that direction!

Alice!

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