Dear Alice,

My best friend has a weight complex. She constantly asks me if I think she’s fat and even asks my boyfriend what he thinks of her weight. She isn’t overweight and I just wish she would stop worrying about it all the time. Is there anything I can do to convince her she isn't fat?

Sincerely,  
Want to help

Answer

Dear Want to help,  

It can be difficult to hear someone you care about constantly putting her or himself down. Your best friend's constant remarks about weight indicate that she feels uneasy about herself. She may be looking for validation to feel better about her body, at least temporarily. Unfortunately, you may not be able to change the way your best friend sees herself, regardless of how many times you tell her she's not fat. You can, however, provide support in several different ways. This may help your friend on her path to seeing herself in a better light. Here are some suggestions:

- **Express yourself.** Let your friend know how her constant worrying impacts you. Does it make you sad or stress you out? Are you concerned that her preoccupation with her weight may be impacting other parts of her life? Letting her know these things may motivate her to look at how her behavior is affecting those around her and her own well-being.
- **Model positive behavior.** Make an effort to stop talking about diets and "imperfect" body parts. Challenge media images that unrealistically portray women — to yourself and out loud with your family and friends.
- **Be positive and encourage your friend to do the same.** Ask her what she likes about herself. Too often people focus on the negative aspects of their bodies and personalities. Rarely do people tell themselves how much they love their bodies or focus on all the amazing things their bodies can do.
- **Encourage her to seek support.** Speaking with a mental health provider or meeting with a
support group may help her deal with her issues in a healthy manner.

Remember, your friend's issues likely go much deeper than the surface. The way a person views her or his body affects self-esteem. A person with high self-esteem has high self-worth and a positive self-image. People with low self-esteem are very critical about themselves. Low self-esteem can have a whole host of negative consequences, including being more at risk of developing eating disorders. Those with severe body image issues may benefit from using antidepressants or cognitive behavior therapy.

Overall, your willingness to help and active seeking out of information is a great start. While your friend's constant questioning may seem pesky, she may be dealing with much greater issues. So equip yourself with knowledge and a positive attitude — she may follow in your footsteps!

Alice!
Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity
Body Image

Related questions
Fat or built? Obsessed with building muscle (megarexia) What's a healthy weight? Worried about a loved one with bulimia Media and body image

Resources
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)
Mental Health Services (CUIMC)
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If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

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