



Depression and Body Image



Australians spend up to a million dollars per day on weight loss programs that have little effect on their weight.

This is astounding considering the number of people who are still unhappy with their weight and the number of people who are overweight or obese around the globe. Obviously these programs are not working. A large number of detrimental health effects are associated with dieting, especially when episodes of dieting are followed by weight gain. In addition, dieting can sometimes make you feel depressed and is linked with poor self-image.

Many people tend to care about what other people think of them. This is an unfortunate fact of life. We all want to be popular and liked. Of course you want to look your best, however, your desire to look good is unhealthy when it leads to obsession about your appearance, depression, or an inability to function in other aspects of your life. The media has a lot to answer for as we are constantly bombarded by images of ultra thin celebrities that are labelled beautiful even though many of them may be considered underweight and unhealthy. As a result of this influence people grow up believing they are imperfect and MUST endeavour to meet the socially accepted criteria of beauty (regardless of the costs). Further, prejudices and an inability to accept imperfection in others are also unconsciously developed.

Perceived Body Image Distortion (PBID) has been demonstrated to be linked with low self-esteem and therefore with depression. There is a high correlation between self-esteem and depression, eating disorders and other indicators of poor mental health. Specifically studies have shown that low-self esteem is correlated with depression and eating disorders. People tend to focus attention on whatever it is that drives their self-image, such as dieting and weight loss if their self-image is based on being thin.

Studies have demonstrated that by the time many children reach adolescence they already have a clearly distorted view of their body. In fact, girls as young as 6 and 7 have reported commencing fad diets in an attempt to lose weight. Females tend to perceive themselves as being larger than they really are and vice versa for males and these beliefs in turn influence their self-esteem. This is a real concern, as young children are learning from a young age that being thin equals being happy, popular and successful.

Unfortunately many people do not change these beliefs as they get older. In fact most people carry these insecurities about their appearance throughout the remainder of their lives. These beliefs are at the core of self-image and will influence your ability to live a healthy and happy life. If you fall into this category, you need to challenge these beliefs and work at the route of the problem. Instead of working from the outside in, you need to work from the inside out.

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