

Steps to a Better Body Image

Avoid buying health, fitness, and male fashion magazines that encourage unhealthy ideals. Love your body, not theirs.

Recognize that bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. There is no one 'right' body size.

Remind yourself that your body size, shape, or weight does not determine your worth as a person, or your identity as a gay man.

Be aware of the negative messages you tell yourself about your appearance.

Focus on qualities in yourself that you like that are not related to your appearance.

Find friends who are not overly concerned with weight or appearance.

Look critically at the ads that push the 'body perfect' message. Our culture emphasizes the V - shaped muscular body shape as ideal for men. Work not towards a 'perfect' male body, but rather one that is healthy.

Demonstrate respect for men who possess body types or who display personality traits that do not meet cultural standards for masculinity.

Community Resources

For information and support, contact:

The Avenue Community Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity
#201 - 320 21st Street W.
Saskatoon, SK S7M 4E6
tel: 306.665.1224 fax:306.665.1380
www.avenuecommunitycentre.ca
info@avenuecommunitycentre.ca

Bridgepoint Centre for Eating Disorders
P.O. Box 190
Milden, SK S0L 2L0
tel: 306.935.2240 fax: 306.935.2241
bridgepoint@sk.sympatico.ca

Vicki Herman, M.Ed., Registered Psychologist
Student Counseling Services
University of Saskatchewan
Mental Health Outreach Coordinator
91 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, S7N 0W0
tel: 306.966.4920 fax: 306.966.7059

University of Saskatchewan Students' Union Pride Centre
Rm 104 Memorial Union Building, on campus.
tel: 306.966.6615 fax: 306.6978

Youth Resource Centre —Mental Health Resources
(must be under 18yrs of age)
311 - 20th St. E.
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0W8
tel: 306.655.4900

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Body Image & Gay Men

Information
& Resources



Body Image and Gay Men

BODY IMAGE is emerging as a serious health concern in the gay men's community. A popular culture filled with unrealistic images of male beauty can have an impact on how many gay and bisexual men feel about themselves. For some men, this may result in poor self esteem and depression, eating disorders, compulsive exercising, and steroid use.

Emergence of a 'body perfect' culture in the gay men's community happened for many complex reasons. It has been suggested that a widespread culture of muscled bodies arose in part in response to the AIDS health crisis. As AIDS ravaged the gay community in the '80s, people frequently wasted away and looked gravely ill. The onset of anti-Viral drugs in combination with weight training changed the way many gay men living with HIV looked. It became one way gay men could regain control of their bodies and feel empowered while living with HIV.

At the same time, a lot of uninfected men went to the gym to keep fit as a way of announcing to the world that they were not ill. In doing so, gym-built bodies became the standard for being physically attractive and sexually desirable in the gay men's community.

The challenges now lie in building a community in which gay men of all shapes and body types, ages, cultures, and identities are acknowledged and valued.

Health and Body Image

There is nothing wrong with wanting to look good, have a toned body, and to be in good health. Body concerns only become unhealthy when the need to change your appearance begins to interfere or undermine your social relationships, your performance at school or work, or create emotional distress (anxiety, depression) and/or physical health problems.

Eating Disorders

Recent studies suggest that 10% of all eating disorder cases are males. It also appears that up to 80% of these cases are gay men. While eating disorders most often develop during teen years, boys as young as 8 and men as old as 60 have been affected.

Eating disorders in men, as in women, are not about food, but about other aspects in their life. Eating disorders may develop as a way of coping with stress, low self-esteem and/or conflicts. If you or a friend are struggling with an eating disorder, for more info and help, contact the Saskatchewan HealthLine at 877-800-0002;

http://www.health.gov.sk.ca/Rr_eating_disorders.html

Compulsive exercise

The compulsive exerciser is no longer free to choose -- exercise becomes necessary and essential. While temporary feelings of well being or even euphoria may result, the compulsive exerciser can experience overwhelming feelings of guilt and anxiety when the opportunity to workout is denied.

Steroid Use

While some men take steroids for a legitimate health problem, a growing number of gay men are using anabolic steroids to gain muscle mass (bulk up) that would be impossible without chemical assistance.

In addition to concerns about impurities of steroids bought on the 'street,' anabolic steroid use can result in increased risks of heart disease, liver problems, change in blood pressure/stroke, and prostate cancer. Some people also experience severe mood disorders, aggression and rage, and impaired judgment.

Whether you are thinking about trying steroids, or are currently using them, it is important you consider the risks associated with steroid use. If there is someone you trust, try talking about some of these issues with them.

If you want to make some changes without stopping steroid use completely, consider reducing the number and length of cycles, or using less potent steroids. Consider talking to your doctor about your usage, and have liver enzyme and blood tests during your cycles of use.

