

# Factors of body image



## Body Image

The title slide of the topic of body image carries a wonderful message. This message was undoubtedly my reaction after watching the complete video. The message was as clear as the day. " Don't let " Ideal" get in the way of real health". With the hip and happening trend of staying in shape gaining popularity in the last two decades, the importance of body image along with all of its perks and cons are under a microscopic view. Despite so much awareness about a healthy body image, the meaning of the word healthy has somewhat been diluted in these last two decades. The introductory slide sheds light on this exact fact. We should not, at any cost let our " idealistic" bodies get in the way of our healthy ones. Instead of taking the easy way out, we should opt for the hard one. The acquirement of a well toned body image that satisfies all the categories of staying fit and staying in shape should be pursued carefully.

Achieving a " healthy" body can be a difficult task with the challenges faced by all of us today. I agree with the speaker when she says that our lives involve challenges pertaining to the societal pressures, family pressures, challenges from work and countless other aspects. In the midst of all these challenges, achieving a healthy and clean body requires much effort and focus that is only achievable with an extra amount of will power and dedication. The point of " Superwoman Syndrome" raised in the presentation was very relatable. Women do try to be perfect associating inspiring activities of different people with themselves. They try to take a multitude of these inspiring features and include them in their lives, thus giving birth to the Superwoman Syndrome. This is not a very healthy activity because it

creates an altogether different type of a woman. This woman would be frustrated and irritated if she is not able to witness the same level of results that she did on the other person. This would end in a degrading self esteem and we all know how harmful a deprecating self esteem can be. It is called a syndrome for a reason. An amalgam of multiple features might not always co-exist in the same person.

I completely agree with the guest speaker Andrea when she says that the body image is hugely connected with how one perceives oneself. Our self confidence and self esteem are two of the most important and decisive factors that decide our capability of influence over our own body image. Needless to say, ones perception of oneself and how people look towards one is the driving force behind the change in body image. Body image undoubtedly plays a tremendous part in boosting or draining our self esteem. History has seen many changes in perceptions of the people as far as the body image is concerned. What we call fashionable today might not be categorized as anything to close to fashion in some other time frame. The perceptions of body image have also changed from time to time with people focusing on the tiny waists in the civil war times to preferring a more full figured female figure in the late 1800s. There is no deniability in the fact that these trends have existed in the past; some of them even absurd and harmful to the physical body. For instance, the tiny waists of the pre-civil war clearly showcase how women used to treat their bodies back then. Fitting themselves in those kinds of dresses might require starvation which definitely does not come in the category of healthy eating habits. This is exactly the reason why we are discussing the preference of a healthy body

over an ideal one. So that trends like these should not come back to trend. The need of the moment is to generate authentic information on achieving the healthy body instead of the “ ideal” one. The healthy body would be devoid of any mishaps in the future. Your body would help you in your old age if you help it in the young. Take care of it right now and it will take care of you for the rest of your life.

Even the history provides evidence of the preference of a healthy body over a seemingly ideal yet thin one. The beginning of the 1920's highlighted the era of the flappers which contradicted the more full figured women. The women preferred to be flat chested but this trend did not last long for obvious reasons. The trend that followed however became a huge success. This trend highlighted the full figure of women empowering them to avoid any unhealthy eating or starving practices to keep themselves fashionable. To analyze all of this with respect to the aspect of body image, we need to observe the changing trends over the last two centuries. From busty to thin, busty again later on to be replaced by thin again, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen it all. These trends were not just related to fashion and the glamorous lifestyles of people following them. The macro-economic factors had each and every role in their partaking. For instance, in the late 1920's, after the trend of flappers faded off, the full figured woman was considered to be the talk of the town. The great depression had its after effects on each and every field of the country. Health was on the top of the damage list. People were skinny and weak because of the lack of nutrition and good food. In such times, a full figured woman carrying a full bust was considered to be a fashionable sign. This figure represented the idea that a woman had enough

to maintain a healthy lifestyle thereby not being included in the category of the poor.

The US has been plagued with obesity and there is absolutely no denying the fact that this country has by far the greatest number of obese people as compared to the other countries of the world. This is considered to be a widespread reason for people not being able to achieve a healthy body with a healthy mind. The overweight trend has made it difficult for people to achieve the status of a healthy body now, thus making it even more unattainable. Not only is it extremely difficult for them to shed the weight, they cannot find themselves concentrated and strong willed enough to achieve their dream figure. Not that I believe that a thin figure is what we should all work for, I do think that obesity is the cause of many other diseases thereby making it a necessity to get rid of. Same goes for the case of starving oneself to achieve an "ideal" figure. I perfectly agree with the guest speaker when she says that the "thin idea internalization" is the reason why we lose too much weight. It is the person inside us which tells us that our success and beauty is connected with how thin we are. Not only do we listen to this person and put our bodies through a tormented ordeal, we justify ourselves in a later stage. It is like harming oneself and then trying to drag in logic to prove it. Barbara Cohen puts these words very elegantly in her book "The Psychology of Ideal body image as an oppressive force in the lives of women". She is of the view that society says that women have to be beautiful to be worthy. In doing so, the society sets such unattainable standards that are very hard to achieve. In spite of standing up against such

standards, the women tend to sacrifice their health to go a long way to achieve the unachievable.

The media has played a crucial role in spreading the image of the “ ideal” body among the youth. The survey in the presentation clearly showed that the age group of 8-18 spends about 8 hours of media time daily. Why would these tender minds not pick up such trends then? If they are bombarded with facts and figures throughout the day, who is to say that they would not start thinking about the “ ideal” body as soon as possible? These young minds imitate their celebrity idols in each and every way. This might be another reason why the power of the body image trend is progressing at such a rapid rate. The studies mentioned in the presentation show that children spending more time in front of the television sets tend to gain more weight as compared to the ones which prefer doing something else. This is an advice for the parents. They should encourage their children to spend less time in front of their television sets and more on some physical activity. Engaging in any sort of sports would not only help them in coping up with their time but it would also provide them with the added advantage of a healthy body. However, if the parents are unable to do that, the children will succumb to conformity and media pressure. They would their idols in each and every way. They mimic their appearances, their nutrition advices and their endorsements on top of all. These celebrities are utilized as high profit multinationals to sell their products and they do so without fully accepting their influential powers on these young minds. The average teens view about 400-600 advertisements per day. These advertisements include both the subliminal ones are the obvious ones. Another fact that I absolutely agree

with is that 69% of girls are of the view that the magazine models are their source of inspiration for their ideal bodies. This significantly large number of female segment deems these fashion models to possess the “ Ideal” figure, a figure that they would do anything for. They try to achieve this figure in their own ways which usually ends up in them harming their bodies and creating nutritional deficiencies which have to be neutralized with more scientific vitamins and synthetic stuff. Attention on natural food and fruits is hardly the talk of the town now. Despite the fact that we all know that the natural fruits and vegetables are the best possible things to consume, we somehow choose to sidetrack them and eat all the synthetic stuff to cater to our need to be healthy. Even after all of that consumption, we still lack the level of fitness that deems us fit.

Dieting is yet another important yet harmful aspect that contradicts its purpose. The guest speaker clearly presents her viewpoint when she says that dieting might cause temporary weight loss but it causes a weight gain in the next 4to 5 years to come. What good is starvation when it ultimately leads to more weight gain? This is the question we should be asking ourselves before we start dieting the next time. The temporary loss of a few pounds would not only create deficiencies in your body, it would also weaken your immune system. The loss of freshness is an evident feature in such cases. Your body’s intake of the necessary vitamins and minerals would be harmed and you would be the sole reason of that. But what can one do if not diet? The answer to this question is known to all of us but we just do not want to go that way. We prefer the easy way instead of the hard one. Instead of exercising and maintaining a well toned figure, we go for the consumption

of synthetic and laboratory chemical vitamins which are harmful for the body in the long run. The only healthy way to stay in shape is the consumption of healthy food along with a fixed exercise routine.

Studies have clearly shown that the low fitness groups of different categories (moderately overweight, overweight, obese) are the ones who are vulnerable to death at an earlier than expected rate. These studies are long term and they have clearly cemented their opinions about fitness being the vital tool to live a long and healthy life. Not only do fit people enjoy a well toned figure, their life expectancy is also at a considerably higher level as compared to the people who do not exercise at all. Studies based on the cardiovascular also show that at every level of body fat, mortality is higher in the category of unfit people. These are the people who do not take care of their bodies. They usually end up dying from a heart attack. This lack of fitness is evident from their body shapes. Low fitness deaths do not hold any discrimination with regard to gender as well. Women as well as men die because of their lack of fitness regimes. The need of the moment is generation of authentic awareness campaign worldwide. These campaigns should fulfill their purpose by telling the people that they need to put a halt on their unhealthy eating habits because they are lowering their life expectancy rates themselves.