

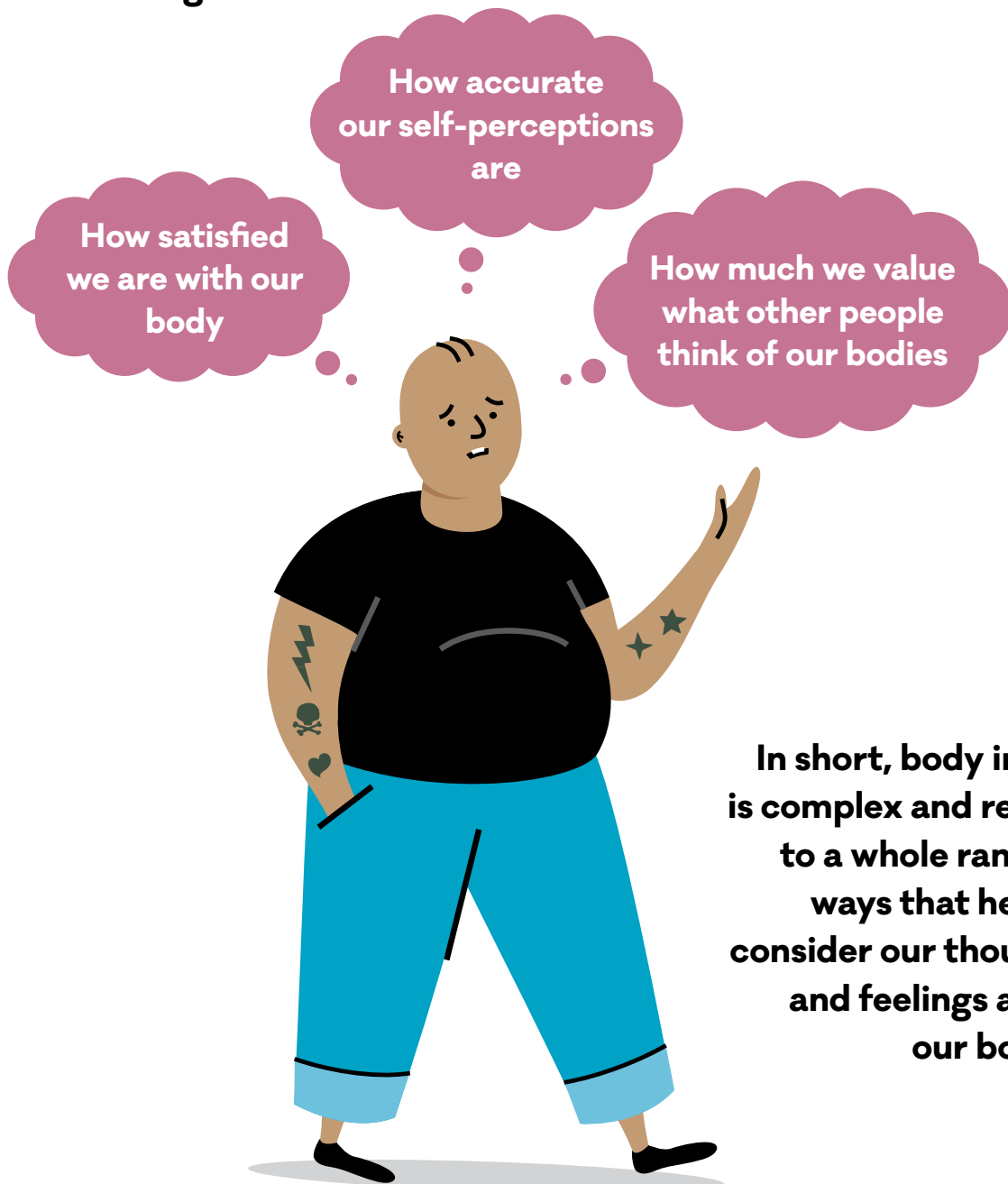
MINO OVER MIRROR

The information presented here is derived from the Body Image report (Mental Health Awareness Week, 2019) and responses to our May 2021 survey.



WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

Body image is a term to describe how we think and feel about our bodies including:



In short, body image is complex and relates to a whole range of ways that help us consider our thoughts and feelings about our bodies.

DYSMORPHIA & LITVBY

CAN SHAPE BEAUTY WELLBEING CHANGES

E ILLNESS FACT IDENTITY

LIKE BODY FEEL

BMI IT IMAGE

ACCEPTANCE SOCIAL MEDIA DISORDER PEOPLE INFORMATION

SHAME FEEL HEALTHY

LOOK TOOLS DIFFERENT HEARTRY

TIPS NORMAL

EATING WELLS

“NORMAL”

LEARNED LEARNING

CONFIDENCE

1/3 OF UK ADULTS REPORTED FEELING 'DOWN' OR 'LOW' BECAUSE OF THEIR BODY IMAGE.



We've seen a boom of information about body image in recent years with some excellent campaigns ([see Dove's Be Real Body Confidence campaign](#)) raising the profile of this challenge for so many. However, UK adults still struggle with their body image.

The statistic above tells us two things.

- 1. If you struggle with body image difficulties, you're not alone.**
- 2. Body image is directly linked to our mental health.**

This means body image concerns are real, they are common and we don't need to just ignore how we feel about ourselves.

Most of us would agree that we still need more information about body image – especially on how to change our body image to be healthier.

"A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE ISN'T A DESTINATION. IT'S ABOUT THE JOURNEY TOWARDS ACCEPTANCE."

MHF Young Leader

Healthy body image = acceptance
Healthy body image ≠ perfection

Research shows that aiming for an unrealistic ideal can create unhelpful attitudes about ourselves. We begin to seek perfection, based on ideals that we see around us. Even though we know, really, no one is perfect – we sometimes convince ourselves that we should aim towards perfection.

HEALTHY BODY IMAGE = ACCEPTANCE

(Healthy body image ≠ perfection)

Research shows that aiming for an unrealistic ideal can create unhelpful attitudes about ourselves. We begin to seek perfection, based on ideals that we see around us. Even though we know, really, no one is perfect – we sometimes convince ourselves that we should aim towards perfection.

The result? We feel like we're never enough. We can't reach perfection, so we're always reaching. It's exhausting. And it doesn't lead to a healthy body image.

Working towards acceptance, not perfection, can lead to a healthier body image.



TIP#1

JOURNEY TO THE LAND OF ACCEPTANCE

Leave the Land of Never-Perfect and join the Land of Acceptance, where critical self-comments are always checked against reality. Negative self-comparisons don't thrive in the Land of Acceptance. Statements of gratitude are sent out as a

reply to negative self-comments. In this Land of Acceptance, we recognize when our body is strong, or useful or simply ours, and so we love it dearly. We only have one. It's a unique and prized possession.



BONUS TIP

Enjoying moments of self-care can also promote healthy self-acceptance. It doesn't need to cost the earth. A self-given foot massage can be used to end the day and ground us into moments of well-deserved relaxation. To splash out, getting a therapeutic massage can also lend us a feeling of acceptance through enjoyment in the body that we have. When doing self-care to build acceptance, it helps to focus on things that make us feel positive within ourselves.

WHAT AFFECTS BODY IMAGE?

1. LIFE EXPERIENCES

There are many life experiences that can affect how we think and feel about our bodies. Pregnancy and childbirth are among the most significant experiences that impact our body image. Divorce or separation, as well as birthdays or getting older, can also shift our body image.

Some body image difficulties are a result of traumatic life experiences, such as abuse or bullying. It's important to recognize when there is past trauma that impacts how we feel about ourselves. Sometimes we feel that if we change how we look, we can change how we feel inside. But it doesn't often work that way. Processing difficult feelings is key to a healthy body image and good mental health.

TIP#2

Changing how we look won't often change how we feel inside. It might be helpful to process difficult thoughts and feelings with a trained and skilled therapist or mental health professional.



2. THE INTERNET

Most of us get our information about body image from online sources. The internet offers a wealth of knowledge but also can skew our perceptions about ourselves, especially if we're comparing ourselves with other people. What we view online can give us an inaccurate idea of physical perfection and reduce our confidence in ourselves.

Some of us look for body positive sources – others of us tend to absorb unhelpful information. Some of us aren't conscious of what we're seeing online. We all sometimes take in information without realising that it is impacting how we think and feel about ourselves.

TIP#3

It's helpful to ask myself how I think and feel when browsing online. Does the content I'm viewing make me compare myself with others? Do I feel negatively about myself during or after viewing online content? If so, I can change what I view so that I have a balanced experience online.

The way we use social media mirrors how we do other things in life. Eating a balanced diet does mean sometimes taking in less of what is unhealthy and more of what is healthy for our bodies. The mind works in the same way! By being aware of what we consume online, we can more easily achieve a healthy balanced internet life.

**BONUS
TIP**



3. ADVERTISING COSMETIC TREATMENTS

1/3 OF ADULTS FELT THAT "YOUR VALUE AS A PERSON DEPENDS ON HOW YOU LOOK".

Most of us (a whopping 93%, in fact) have seen advertisements for cosmetic treatments. Facebook is probably the most common outlet for these advertisements, but TV, Instagram, and posters on high street clinics are also frequently used to promote offers. Even dentist clinics now promote cosmetic treatments that go beyond dentistry.

ALMOST HALF OF UK ADULTS AGREED THAT "HOW YOU LOOK AFFECTS WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE IN LIFE"

Advertisements for cosmetic treatments can easily create feelings of inadequacy. They can give the impression that we need to pour money and pain into procedures in order to achieve a certain look, to be attractive, desirable or wanted. This is the emotional

result of a well-crafted technique to market products. And it does lead nearly 2/3 of us to click on the advert and find out more.

Being conscious and aware of the effect of advertisements is important. This way, we can make decisions about our self-care and appearance that are in our best interests.

*"Made me momentarily consider how I felt about the area they were targeting."
(Survey participant)*

TIP#4

Marketing techniques are designed to get an emotional response from us. Notice the feelings and thoughts that arise from viewing advertisements and promotions. We can take note of what influences our feelings about ourselves.

*"There are times I've looked at them and I've compared myself and it's made me feel like I was lacking. Even though I've got relatively good self-acceptance, it makes me doubt."
(Survey participant)*

*"I feel like I'm letting myself down and that no man will ever look at me because I'm not desirable."
(Survey participant)*

4. THINK HEALTH AND WELLNESS

We know that body image is linked to mental health. People who struggle with self-harm, eating problems or body dysmorphia are especially vulnerable to body image concerns. Some anxiety problems and mood difficulties, like depression, can also influence our negative self-talk and lower our focus on self-kindness and self-care.

Understanding mental health and what affects us can be so helpful to having a healthy body image. When we are struggling in one area, the other is likely to be affected.

It's much the same with our physical health which also interacts with body image. Conditions like diabetes, hormone regulation problems or side-effects of some medications can all create further challenges for our body image.

***If we notice changes that are significantly impacting how we engage with life, it's important to talk to a GP or other health professional.**

TIP#5

When our body image takes a nose dive, we can consider what might be impacting that. Has our mood dipped? How are my energy levels? Have I been eating and sleeping normally? Might hormones or a major life change be affecting how I feel about myself? All of these questions and answers can be clues to help us figure out and understand the unique and personal experience within our own bodies.



5. DECIDING ON A CHANGE

Some of us will want to opt for cosmetic treatments, for many and varying reasons. Some of us might just be thinking about it. Others of us don't want any treatments and have never considered this as an option. Some of us might want treatments but find the cost to be a barrier.

*"To be beautiful is only for people with money."
(Survey participant)*

There are some protections to consider for ourselves before deciding on a cosmetic treatment, such as thinking about who might perform any treatment.

TIP#6 ASK QUESTIONS BEFORE GETTING ANY COSMETIC TREATMENT

Use a checklist for due diligence before attending a consultation. The following points are suggested by people who are experienced in having a range of cosmetic treatments:

Find out more before booking that first consultation. There are different risks to different types of treatments. Know the risks. I will research and make an informed choice about the treatment I'm after. Some treatments are far more invasive than others; some have higher cost in the long term (such as repeat treatments being required); others take longer to heal and more risks associated with the after care.

Do I want to change my looks or my feelings? If it's feelings that I want to change, I would consider speaking with a psychological professional, before talking to a cosmetic practitioner.

Check that the cosmetic practitioner I'm speaking to is: registered, insured, qualified. I can look at [SaveFace.co.uk](https://www.saveface.co.uk) and [JCCP](https://www.jccp.org.uk) for a list of registered professionals and further guidance.



AND A FEW BONUS TIPS ON ACCESSING COSMETIC TREATMENTS

THINK ABOUT THE PROVIDER

Are they a specialist provider or someone adding in a treatment along with hair and nails? What training have they received to provide the specific type of treatment?

AVOID THE DEALS

Run far from 2-for-1 and other money-saving deals. Quality providers do not give deals like that and the hidden costs and risks can still be there. Quality providers are less likely to skimp on quality products. Always choose 'quality for money' above 'value for money'.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Think it over before getting a treatment. Shop around for a good provider who thinks about wellbeing, after care, regulation and quality control.

CONSIDER THE COST

Some treatments might seem cheap at first, but hidden costs can creep up. This might be the cost of aftercare, repeated treatments or complications from the treatment. Consider that this one-off cost may actually not be full the price in the long run.

6. KNOW THE NORMS

Do we know the average clothing size for UK women? Do we know the average hip to waist to thigh ratio? Not to compare with others, but to know that much of what we see online is actually quite doctored, airbrushed, filtered, modified – in one way or another – in such a way as to give a false impression of what is ‘normal’.

We could ask the same questions about our impression of faces – do we look at our unique patterns, textures and shapes with shame or with acceptance? Do we compare with skewed imagery, based on

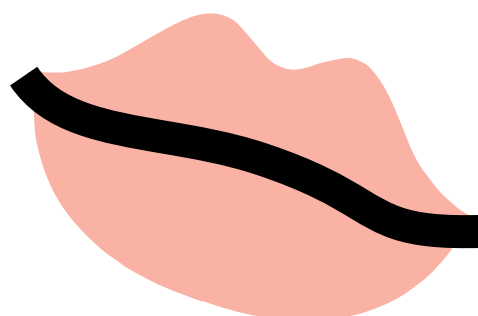
what we see in advertisements, online, film, and so on?

Sometimes our idea of what’s ‘normal’ is distorted according to what we see online and on TV. Whether its make-up, hair, lighting or beneath-the-skin changes, we are surrounded by imagery that is altered.

It’s common to every culture, this tendency to change the starting point of our appearance. Braids; tattoos; elaborate jewelry and decorative clothing. This is something humans have done since the dawn of time and in every place that culture exists. To varying degrees, men and women have always taken a creative approach to changing how we look.

TIP#7

The question to ask ourselves is: are we changing our appearance to reflect our culture or subculture, or are we changing ourselves out of self-loathing or shame? Whether it’s a photo filter, airbrushing or deciding on a cosmetic treatment, it can be helpful to consider the ‘why’ behind our behaviour. This can also help us to understand the ‘why’ behind other people’s behaviour. It’s healthy to question the reality of the image that’s being presented to us.



IN SUMMARY

Body image is a complex thing, closely related to mental health and affected by so many things around us – people, places, images, culture, the list goes on. What's important is to understand what affects our own body image, for better or for worse. Paying attention to what helps us

maintain a healthy body image, to counter balance the unhelpful effects that come into our daily lives. This way, we can take positive action and make informed choices that benefit our health and wellbeing into the future.

To find out more about body image, you can read [our report](#) (Mental Health Awareness Week, 2019).

To find out more about cosmetic practitioners and procedures, visit the [Save Face](#) and [JCCP](#) website

www.saveface.co.uk

www.jccp.org.uk

If you live with body image concerns or if you would like to address mental health concerns related to body image, the website links below offer advice on who can help.

[Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Beat Eating disorders](#)

[NHS](#)

[Young Minds](#) (for people age 25 and younger)

If you are feeling distressed or upset and would like to speak with someone, please freephone Samaritans on **116 123**.

If you are in immediate danger or in urgent crisis, please call 999 or visit your local A&E.