

**HRIC  
HELPFUL  
HINTS**

**BODY  
IMAGE**

## What it is, how it develops, and how to cultivate body love?

Given our society and culture's growing emphasis on perfectionism and appearances, it can be very hard, if not daunting, to be happy with who we are or what we have. We are constantly bombarded with unrealistic ideals of how we should look, what success should look like, and how to achieve happiness. When it comes to how we look, one of the things we target the most is our body! Are we thin enough, tall enough, toned enough, etc.. All this scrutiny undoubtedly affects how we feel about our body and our body image.

Body Image refers to the picture we have in our minds of what we look like which affects how we see ourselves when we look in the mirror. It is more a reflection of how we feel and think about ourselves than a reflection of what our bodies actually look like. Many of these feelings and thoughts we hold about ourselves and our bodies were internalized early on in our lives. These can be positive or negative, leading to a more positive or negative body image.

The way we experience our body physically also affects our body image. For example, feeling strong and empowered in our bodies has been shown to lead to a more positive body image.

Memories (conscious or unconscious) of past experiences can be stored in the body, thus influencing how we experience and feel about it.

Risk factors that contribute to a poor or negative body image include:

- Low self esteem
- Media's unrealistic messages about the ideal body type, success and happiness
- Peer pressures and familial/societal attitudes around body appearance

- Perfectionism and unrealistic expectations
- Puberty
- History of adverse childhood experiences

Having a healthy body image is a crucial component of good mental health as it promotes self acceptance, self empowerment, and self confidence. Poor body image can take a strong blow on our overall self esteem and has been recognized as one of the risk factors for developing an eating disorder.

### Tips for cultivating a healthy body image or body love:

- Appreciate your body as an instrument rather than object. Celebrate all it can do for you (breathing, laughing, dancing, etc...)
- Remember and embrace the reality that every body is different and there is no one ideal shape or weight. No need to over compare!
- Remember that beauty is not skin deep. Remind yourself of all your internal and external qualities that make you your own special, unique, and beautiful human being.
- Become aware of any negative feelings you have had about yourself that have become stored in your body and affect your body image. Challenge the assumptions that perpetuate these negative feelings.
- Practice mindfulness (the art of being present and aware in your body without judgment).
- Wear clothing that makes you feel comfortable in your body. Work with your body, not against it.
- Become a critical observer and challenger of the media and societal messages around body, physical appearance, success, happiness.

**Contact Us**  
(+971) 4 365 8498  
(+971) 50 778 2785  
[hric@hricdubai.com](mailto:hric@hricdubai.com)  
[www.hricdubai.com](http://www.hricdubai.com)



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