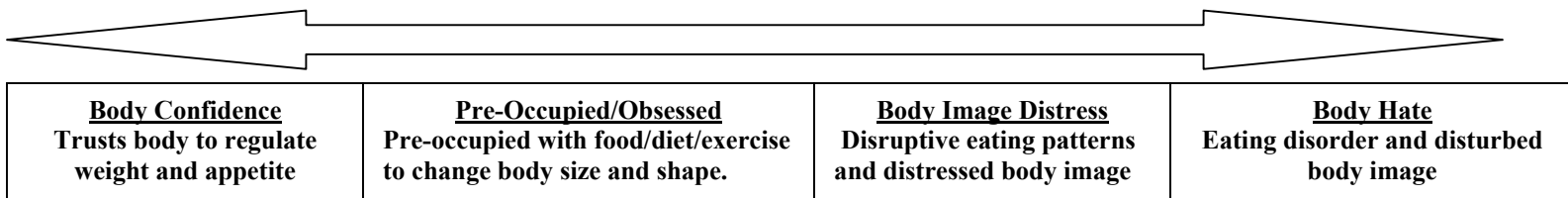


“I think therefore I am”: Body Image/Eating Issues Continuum

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Body image dissatisfaction should not be regarded as an issue afflicting only those with eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia. At some points throughout our lives, each of us—men or women, big or small—have all struggled to attain or to maintain our version of an ideal body image. Body image is simply defined as the attitudes and feelings that we have towards our perceived physical appearance.

One way for someone to regulate body image is through food consumption. On one hand, there are those who exhibit “body confidence”. These individuals exist in a variety of shapes and sizes, and for them, food is not an issue, because they trust their bodies to tell them what to eat and how much of it to consume. Those with eating disorders, on the other hand, restrict food consumption to match their perceived body image, not their actual body shape or size. Feelings about food and body image cover a broad range, and can be described as a continuum. Right-shifting attitudes reflect an increase in body image obsession and more “disordered eating”, while left-shifting attitudes reflect “body confidence” and healthy eating. For many of us, our view of body image and diet fall somewhere in between these two extremes, and body perceptions can shift along the continuum due to external stresses – such as the media, friends or family.



How then, do we maintain healthy bodies amidst pressures to conform to an “ideal body image”? Learning to be comfortable in your own body is key to avoiding and overcoming body image stress. This sounds more difficult than it is, but start small. Begin by identifying features of your body that you like and embrace them. When external stresses cause you to feel more self-conscious about your body image, remind yourself of your positive attributes. The key here is to focus on the positive. Follow up by setting reasonable body image goals that reflect your natural shape/size, while maintaining health as the priority. For instance, if you want to lose 10 pounds ask yourself these questions: 1) Will losing this weight make me feel healthier? 2) Are my dieting/exercise plans realistic and feasible? These steps will help you think rationally about your body image goals.

Changing what and how you think about your body is healthier than working to drastically change your body size and shape by diet and exercise. Your self-esteem depends on accepting yourself as you are. Strive towards feeling good about your self, eating well and being active.

If your feelings about your body and food are difficult or overwhelming – **seek help**. Drop by the Health and Wellness Centre (MUSC B106) for more information. Or visit the National Eating Disorder Information Centre website at www.nedic.ca.

Where to get help on campus? Campus Health Centre ext. 27700;

The Centre for Student Development ext. 24711

Reference: www.gannett.cornell.edu/top10Topics/nutrition-eating/continuum.html