

BBC Radio Shropshire Factsheet

Size matters Compiled June 2004

Size matters... Or does it?

Everywhere, on television, in the papers, in glossy magazines, we see images of slim, fit, happy people. The message we receive is that we have to be thin to be healthy. But we are all different – the ideal weight for one person may be quite wrong for another.

Perhaps the key is to look at our own bodies and learn to accept them; no matter if they are bigger than the film stars and TV personalities.

Body image is the picture you have in your mind about your size, shape and general appearance - and how you think and feel about it. If you feel that you would be happier being thinner, lighter – or even taller, then you have a negative body image. On the other hand, if you accept the way you are, then you have a positive body image. In other words, it's how you view yourself that matters, and although it may be difficult, you can change that view.

In a Mid-Morning programme on BBC Radio Shropshire, Jim Hawkins spoke to Fatima Parker, UK president of the International Size Acceptance Association. They are alarmed by the common notion that obesity is a disease and that it is more deadly than smoking. ISAA UK asserts that more education is required on attaining fitness at every size and how to make healthy food choices.

ISAA's primary purpose is to end the most common form of size discrimination and bigotry – that against fat children and adults; ISAA strives to defend the human rights of members affected by other forms of size discrimination as well.

ISAA defines size discrimination as any action that places people at a disadvantage simply because of their size. ISAA defines size acceptance as acceptance of self and others without regard to weight or body size.

Their website at www.size-acceptance.org/uk/ tells you more about their campaigns and has many interesting articles to read. You can also contact Fatima on 07765 286 182.

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Having a negative body image can be very upsetting. It can also get to the very core of self-esteem (how you like and regard yourself), which can mean that if you don't like your body, you don't like yourself. And if you don't like yourself, you may feel that you either incapable of making lifestyle changes to control your weight - or that you're not worth making the effort for.

Your body image is the way you think and feel about your body. If you think and feel that it's awful, you're bound to feel negative about it. Try to accept it, and think positively about your body and that negativity will ease away. If you asked a friend how they viewed your body, the answer is likely to be very different from yours. And, while not always easy, it is possible to change how you view yourself too.

- Having a more positive body image can also help you to achieve weight loss goals such as being more active.
- Despite our 'slim obsessed' society, effects on health are the main thing to be truly concerned about if you are very overweight, rather than appearance.
- Keep your expectations about goal weights and rate of loss realistic. Remember that we all have different and unique body shapes.
- Seek professional help if you feel that your body image is particularly distressing and stops you from achieving the change you want.

There is no such thing as an ideal weight. Each person has a different body and their healthy weight will be determined by different factors such as genes, food and physical activity. A healthy weight has a very positive effect on our wellbeing and health. Being overweight - or underweight - can cause a wide range of medical problems.

As ever, a good place to look for impartial advice is the BBC web site bbc.co.uk/health/healthy_living/your_weight. You can find tips on a healthy weight for you, fitness, eating well and more on the idea of body image.