

Body Image, Nutrition and Young Adults

Just about everyone has to deal with their own body image issues, but worrying about appearances and proper eating choices can be particularly hard on young adults. First of all, being in high school surrounded by your peers who are often very quick to judge can be extremely intimidating. The pressure to look like one of the male and/or female models that just walked out of a *Cosmo* can be immensely stressful. Additionally, images of celebrities and advertising are constantly sending young adults mixed messages. Fast food industries target teens in their advertising; meanwhile images of emaciated celebrities are a constant topic of debate. There are even whole television shows on MTV devoted to the fad diets and exercise routines of the most popular celebrities.

All these influences are certainly confusing and can very easily lead to young adults making unhealthy choices in order to deal with all the pressure and comply with our society's portrayal of beauty.

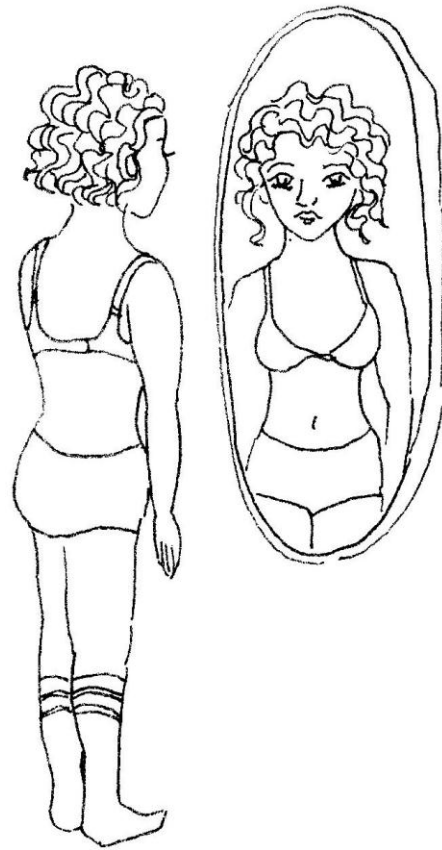
For example, many people, not just young adults, fall victim to eating disorders as a result of trying to achieve what they believe to be a perfect body. Maybe part of the problem is the fact that so many celebrities, whose bodies are seen as perfect, are in fact suffering from eating disorders themselves. For example, there is a long list of celebrities on a website titled *Eating Disorder Referral and Information Center* at www.edreferral.com that have either admitted to having eating disorders or have died from eating disorders. Among them are names like Paula Abdul, Fiona Apple, Mary-Kate Olsen, Ashlee

Simpson, Janet Jackson, and the list goes on. Eating Disorders are so prevalent in youth culture today that they have even been written into popular fiction literature in such a way that they are almost an afterthought. For example, in the very popular *Gossip Girl* series one of the main characters, Blair Waldorf, is very clearly struggling with Bulimia. Her character is constantly attempting to induce vomiting after every time she eats, even at social events. Her friends seem to know about it, but no one even blinks an eye or acts like it's unusual or disturbing. The fact is, while this behaviour seems disturbing and strange, it is likely that in youth culture today it is all too normal.

Of course, it is not only unhealthy to fall victim to Anorexia or Bulimia, but it is actually ill advised that young adults even go on diets. As mentioned in Lynda Madaras' book *My Body My Self for Boys*, it is actually quite dangerous for young adults to go on diets because it can severely interfere with the proper development of their bodies. This is not to say, however, that young adults should eat anything and everything they want without a care for its nutritive value. It is very important for everyone to eat as nutritiously as possible. The safest policy seems to be to follow *Canada's Food Guide*, which has recently been revised, as closely as possible. The guidelines of Canada's Food Guide can be found on the official *Health Canada* website and is easily accessible at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/index_e.html.

Raising awareness of issues surrounding body

image and nutrition for teens is one of the few ways we can try to inspire good nutrition and healthy self-image. There are quite a few works of fiction that may appeal to young adults that deal with issues surrounding body image. For example, there is *Skinny* by Ibi Kaslik, which deals with a young woman struggling with Anorexia and her teenage sister who tries to help her. Another excellent piece of work is Chris Crutcher's *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, which details the friendship of a teenage girl and boy, both with physical abnormalities, who help each other deal with pretty much everything. These are interesting reads and perhaps good recommendations for teens who may want something they can relate to when it comes to dealing with their own body image.



Sources:

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