

View this article online at: patient.info/news-and-features/is-it-possible-to-lose-weight-and-be-body-positive

Can you lose weight and be body positive?

If you search the term 'body positive' on Instagram, nearly 12 million results appear. But body positivity is more than just a hashtag. It's a social movement that promotes the belief that all human beings should have a positive body image.

Body positivity advocates for people to celebrate their bodies and encourages acceptance and health at any size. It also challenges the ways in which society presents and views bodies, in particular, larger bodies. But does this mean you can't be body positive if you want to lose weight?

What is body positivity?

Although the body positivity movement has gained traction on [social media](#), in news reports and pop culture in recent years, it is not new. It has roots throughout history, including in the 19th century Victorian dress reform movement which aimed to end the trend of women having to modify their bodies using corsets, in order to fit the social standards of tiny waistlines.

One of the aims of the modern body positivity movement is to normalise bodies that don't fit into the 'skinny ideal' and break our fixation with it. The movement is also used to highlight the discrimination faced by larger people as well as marginalised groups, including people of colour and people with disabilities.

"Body positivity is about being confident in your body, no matter what it looks like," says Dr Elena Tourni, a consultant psychologist and co-founder of [The Chelsea Psychology Clinic](#).

The difference between 'body positive' and 'positive body image'

It's important to note that there is a difference between being 'body positive' and having a 'positive body image', says [Molly Forbes](#), a body image campaigner and presenter who appeared as a host on Channel 4's body positive show, Naked Beach.

"Body positivity is a political movement which is historically rooted in the celebration of marginalised bodies. It's about challenging social norms that see many people discriminated against because their body may not fit the narrow ideals of beauty and health that we're often presented with," Forbes explains.

Having positive body image is embracing and accepting your body and appreciating it for all that it can do. "It's not just liking what you see in the mirror," Forbes says. "It's possible to be body positive but on a personal level not have a positive body image, and vice versa."

Can you be body positive and lose weight?

"The decision to lose weight might simply be a personal choice and preference rather than socially constructed," says Tourni. "Provided you're not imposing an idea of thinness - on yourself or others - then you can definitely lose weight and still be body positive."

Joanna Konstantopoulou, a psychologist and founder of the [Health Psychology Clinic](#), agrees that it's possible to be body positive while wanting to make lifestyle changes.

"In today's society, it's very easy to get caught up in the hype of looking a certain way and forgetting the importance of a [healthy lifestyle](#). For those who are body positive, but still want to lose weight, their weight loss goals are out of self-improvement, as opposed to negative thoughts about their body."

For example, you might choose to start dance classes for enjoyment or to improve your mental health. If you happen to lose weight, this doesn't mean you aren't body positive, especially if you were happy with your appearance both before and after losing weight.

"If someone is body positive, they do not feel anxious about their body and they accept their body's shape and size," Konstantopoulou says.

How to be body positive when losing weight

Choosing to lose weight, get active or improve your diet doesn't need to be about disliking your body or wanting to meet social beauty standards. Taking better care of yourself is a kind and positive thing to do for your body.

Focus on health-promoting behaviours

When we're thinking about body positivity, it can be helpful to remember that health is made up of many different factors – and not just the way we look.

"[Mental health](#) is just as important as physical health. So rather than focusing on health as a look and chasing a particular type of body that we believe looks to be the epitome of health, it might be better to concentrate on health-promoting behaviours instead," Forbes says.

"For example, how much [sleep](#) are you getting? How often are you seeing your friends? Are you eating in an [intuitive way](#) that feels good for your body and moving in a way that also feels good?"

It's important to remember that pursuing a particular idea of what healthy looks like can lead to unhealthy behaviour patterns, too.

"This is true of my own personal experience. When I was at my thinnest I was also probably at my lowest in terms of my mental health," Forbes says. "I wasn't eating enough and, in my quest to lose the baby weight, I was heavily restricting what I ate and over-exercising. Once I worked on my mindset and made peace with my body, I discovered moving it in a way that felt good. I now swim most days, go to the gym and do regular [yoga](#)."

"Ultimately, you can't tell how healthy someone is from how they look – and that's an important thing to remember when you're trying to answer the question of whether you can be body positive and still actively seek to change your body."

Understand your body

Psychologist [Charlotte Armitage](#) adds that being body positive and confident is about being comfortable within yourself.

"In many cases, body confidence comes from mental and psychological health, rather than being about the way our body looks," she says. "Although people may believe that when they reduce their weight they will feel happier, this idea may actually just be a distraction from what is genuinely causing satisfaction in their lives."

Armitage adds that improving your understanding of your relationship with food, [exercise](#) and your body can help you feel more positive about your body.

"Our relationship with food and body image is inextricably linked to our family, environment and culture; sometimes this can result in a positive, healthy relationship with our bodies and sometimes it can result in a negative relationship," she says.

"If you can start to understand the 'why' about these aspects in your life then it will help to alter your relationship and perception of yourself and others."

Disclaimer: This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

Last updated by: Lydia Smith 31/01/2020	
Peer reviewed by: Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP 31/01/2020	

View this article online at: patient.info/news-and-features/is-it-possible-to-lose-weight-and-be-body-positive

Discuss Can you lose weight and be body positive? and find more trusted resources at [Patient](#).



To find out more visit www.patientaccess.com
or download the app



Follow us

