

Build a Better Body Image

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Having a healthy body image means that you feel good about how you look.

The next time you look in the mirror, compliment yourself. Good self-esteem starts with kindness. Maybe you love the shape of your face, the color of your eyes or your arms that can hug loved ones.



It may sound silly, but positive self-talk can be very helpful. If you tend toward negative self-talk, ask yourself, “Would I be this harsh if I was talking to my friend?” Treat yourself with the same kindness you give to others.



Negative self-talk is linked to having a negative body image or poor self-esteem, which can lead to:

- Eating disorders.
- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Social isolation.
- Substance abuse.
- Suicide.

If you struggle with a negative body image, take steps toward self-care.

Seek a therapist or dietitian who specializes in intuitive eating, compassion-focused therapy or cognitive behavioral therapy to learn techniques for self-acceptance.

Here are three tips that may also help:

- 1. Steer clear of fad diets.** The billion-dollar weight loss industry is built on false promises. Instead, work on building good eating habits and being active with exercise you enjoy.
- 2. Avoid harmful social media.** Studies show social media posts with idealized images have a negative effect on body image. Fill your feeds with realistic tips on eating well and staying active; avoid digitally altered bodies, unrealistic diets and influencers who promote unhealthy behaviors.
- 3. Focus on the positive.** Download an app with daily positive affirmations, keep a journal with inspiring self-talk or leave yourself notes with uplifting sentiments.

There are many things to love about yourself. Start looking and see what you find.

Sugar: Just How Bad Is It?

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD



Added sugar is found in about 65% of products on grocery store shelves, and North Americans tend to consume a lot of the sweet stuff. The trouble is that high-sugar diets — defined as more than 12 teaspoons of added sugar per day — are linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, unhealthy blood cholesterol and some types of cancer.

However, small amounts of sugar appear to be okay. If you add a few teaspoons of sugar to coffee or tea, and enjoy the occasional cookie or bowl of ice cream, there's no cause for concern. Studies show that problems begin when you routinely consume in excess of 48 grams (12 teaspoons) of added sugar per day.

While many celebrities and social media influencers extoll the virtues of their sugar-free diet, going to extremes to cut every granule of sugar is unnecessary and can add excess stress to your life. Stress is linked to lower immune function, so stressing about sugar isn't good for you, either. Obsession about healthy eating is called orthorexia nervosa, and it's a mental health concern.

Instead of overdoing or eliminating sugar, find a happy medium. It's okay to enjoy some sweet indulgences, but don't go overboard.

On average, most Americans consume about 77 grams of sugar daily, which is too much. The No. 1 source of added sugar is sweet beverages; a can of regular cola contains 40 grams (10 teaspoons) of added sugar. The simplest way to cut back on sugar is to drink water instead of soda, fruit drinks, iced tea or other sweet beverages.



And it's important to note that natural sugar from fruit does not count toward that 12-teaspoon daily total. Fruit is packed with fiber, vitamins and minerals, and those beneficial nutrients outweigh the natural sugar content.

Postpartum Depression

By Eric Endlich, PhD



Popular culture often highlights the joy of becoming a parent, but it can also be challenging and exhausting. Some degree of anxiety and moodiness is normal. In fact, 50% to 75% of new parents have a period of sadness and crying known as the baby blues, which may appear in the first few days after birth, subsiding within about two weeks.

Postpartum depression (PPD), a more serious condition, can begin anytime during the first year after delivery. Symptoms affect up to one in seven new mothers and include:

- Disturbed sleep.
- Marked change in eating habits.
- Irritability.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities.
- Impaired concentration or decision-making.
- Feeling guilty, worthless or hopeless.

Of course, sleep disruption and other changes are very common after childbirth. When these symptoms are especially numerous, intense or prolonged, an evaluation for PPD may be appropriate.

Risk factors for PPD include:

- History of depression or PPD.
- Family history of depression.
- Lack of social support.
- Being a teen or single mother.
- Pregnancy or delivery complications (e.g., premature birth).
- Other life stressors, such as relationship conflict, financial problems or recent losses.

Postpartum psychosis, a much rarer condition marked by confusion, paranoia, hallucinations and agitation, should be treated as an emergency.

PPD can improve with psychotherapy, support groups, home nurse visits or medication. Mothers who have thoughts of hurting themselves or their babies should seek immediate medical care.

National Women's Health Week is May 14 to 20.



Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information, visit [coronavirus.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus).

Bicycling Benefits

May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month.



Spring is a perfect time to start bicycling. Although it probably brings back memories from childhood, bike riding is not just for kids. In fact, most people at any age can enjoy bicycling.

While it's great to cycle and enjoy the outdoors, you can also use an indoor stationary bike when the weather isn't great. If you bicycle regularly to visit a friend or run an errand, you'll boost your physical fitness goal almost effortlessly.

Bicycling regularly is a great way to burn calories and lose excess weight. It also builds muscle strength — especially in the legs — and improves balance. Bike riding is low-impact and raises your heart rate slowly. It also puts less pressure on your joints than high-impact workouts.

Because it's an aerobic exercise, bicycling helps strengthen your heart, blood vessels and lungs and can lower your risk for cardiovascular disease. What's more, bicycling has been shown to reduce stress and help relieve anxiety and depression.

If you are new to exercise or have any chronic health problems, talk to your health care provider before bicycling. And practice cycling safety. Wear a good-quality, certified bike helmet, obey all traffic signs and rules and wear bright or reflective clothes so drivers can see you.



Choosing a Medical Alert System

As Baby Boomers age, and more medical alert systems are on the market, it can be hard to choose the appropriate one for your or a loved one's needs.

There are different types of monitored and unmonitored systems: at-home, wearable on-the-go, traditional or specialized.

Monitored: Depending on the type you choose, these systems connect you to a 24/7 call center that fields calls for help, dispatches emergency medical services and contacts loved ones. They frequently offer features, such as fall detection, activity tracking and medication reminders. Monitored systems usually have a monthly charge.

Unmonitored: These systems have no monthly fees. They do not use a call center and do not provide additional tracking services. They will connect directly to 911 or your contacts, but they usually lack fall detection, activity tracking, medication reminders and wellness checks.

Use these tips to choose the right system:

- Check your insurance policy for coverage.
- Be aware of possible fees, such as monthly and annual, shipping, activation and up-front device charges.
- Check for a warranty, a money-back guarantee or a contract.
- Consider these key features before buying: emergency medical call buttons, automatic fall detection, GPS tracking, landline or mobile connection, water-resistance, device mobility, in-home range, two-way communication and monitoring.
- Optional features to consider include activity tracking, lockbox, medication reminders, remote answering, spouse monitoring and wellness checks.



May is Older Americans Month.

To learn more, search for medical alert systems at [ncoa.org](https://www.ncoa.org).

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Coping with Chronic Health Problems**, is at personalbest.com/extras/23V5tools.



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