

## Positive Body Image

How do you see yourself when you look in the mirror? Do you see your body as it truly is or do you have a distorted image of yourself? People with a negative body image are at greater risk for developing an eating disorder. Eating disorders affect 35 million people in America. Though the majority is younger women, this disorder affects men, children and the **elderly**. *National Eating Disorders Awareness Week* is 2/25-3/3/07 and offers an opportunity to educate ourselves about this often undiagnosed disorder.

**“Eating disorders are illnesses with a biological basis** modified and influenced by emotional and cultural factors.” (Nat’l Eating Disorders Association) The stigma associated with eating disorders prevents individuals from seeking treatment. “While eating disorders are serious, potentially life threatening illnesses, there is help available and **recovery is possible.**” (NEDA)

There are other reasons, beside an eating disorder, for the elderly to have weight loss – depression, medical problems, medications, dental problems, and loss of taste and smell. This article will not address these but will focus on creating a positive body image.

Taking care of your body and doing healthy things, which make you happy, has a huge impact on how you feel about yourself and how you view your body. Focus on your good qualities – your kindness to others, skill in games, interest in current events, or creativity – whenever you start to feel negatively about your body. Spend less time in front of a mirror. Participate in activities you enjoy – even if they “expose” your size to others. Appreciate people for who they are – how they think, feel and act – not how they look. Apply this same standard to yourself. We have heard the saying, “Beauty’s but skin-deep” (John Davies, English poet 1616), but know that true beauty lies beneath the surface. Find your inner beauty and then take care of your whole body – take a bubble bath, a “cat nap” or talk to a friend.

It is important to have a positive body image – not just to avoid the risk of developing an eating disorder. People who have a positive body image are less likely to be depressed; have a good self-esteem; and lead happier, healthier lives.

If you think you have an eating disorder, speak with your doctor. For more information, you can call the Nat’l Eating Disorder Association Hotline 1-800-931-2237. Or if you’d like to talk further about this, you can call Kathy Laufer, social worker at the senior center, at 617-796-1663.