

# Self-Esteem And Body Image

- **Self-esteem is about how confident you feel about yourself and your place in the world**
- **How you feel about the way your body looks and what it can do affects your self-esteem**
- **A negative body image can lead to depression and lower life satisfaction in people with disabilities**
- **Positive body image can help you adjust to a disability**

Many polio survivors have a positive sense of themselves. However, some people develop negative feelings about the way their body looks (static body image) and moves (kinetic body image). This can include distress about:

- their height
- how symmetrical (balanced) the body is
- how strong they are
- how their body functions

Some people may feel that their culture expects their body to look or move a certain way. Or they may experience stigma from other people about their polio. This stigma may lead to isolation.

Body image may impact an individual's professional life. For example, they may not be able to give a firm handshake. It might also impact them on a personal level. They may not feel attractive or desirable. People may also take on negative messages about their physical appearance. This is known as self-stigmatisation.

Self-esteem is made up of the messages we tell ourselves about how we look, feel, think and act in the world. A negative body image can have an effect on self-esteem.

Thank you Dr Andrew Sinclair and Jenny Koadlow from [Independence Australia](#) for providing content for this fact sheet.

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## What you can do

Most people with disability develop a healthy body image over time. It is important to recognise that disability is only one aspect of who you are. People who best manage their body image with a disability:

- recognise that images of the ideal body are unrealistic for most people
- remind themselves that there is a wide variety of body types and function
- focus on their worth as a person rather than comparing themselves to others
- take a non-judgmental view of themselves and others by connecting instead of comparing
- value their own personality and achievements
- realise that attractiveness is more a way of 'being' than what you physically look like
- see their aids and equipment (crutches, wheelchair, etc.) as tools to help them rather than what defines them

## More Information

- To access treatment, see your general practitioner for a **Mental Health Care Plan** and referral to a **psychologist or other mental health professional**
- Look for a support network
- If you need urgent mental health assistance, contact **Lifeline on 13 11 14**



Health