

# Health at Every Size: So, What's Normal?

## Lesson Plan (Grades 6 to 12)

This lesson accompanies the colourful poster "[So, What is Normal?](#)"

Through this lesson, students learn to:

- Identify, respect and accept diverse shapes and sizes in teen bodies
- Embrace a healthy lifestyle at any body shape or size

The lesson plan on healthy eating, "[How Well Do You Think You Eat?](#)" is a recommended follow-up to these activities.

Estimated time: 45-60 minutes

### Key Concepts

- Our culture is obsessed with physical appearance. Unrealistic media images, adults expressing dissatisfaction with their own bodies, overemphasis on rapid weight loss and body shape changes can get in the way of having a positive body image.
- The process involved with making an ad is very complex and produces unrealistic images (hair, make up, photoshop, etc).
- No one particular shape or size is healthier than another when healthier lifestyles are followed. What's important is to respect and appreciate the variety of body shapes and sizes.
- The key is to be active, eat well and feel great at any body shape or size.

### Materials

- "[So, What is Normal?](#)" Poster
- AV/ computers/ computer lab
- Advertisements from teen magazines for the Hype or Health? Activity
- Dove "Fabricating Beauty" clip (can be found on YouTube)
- Pictures of body images throughout history and cultures to illustrate how society influences body image
- Class set of activity sheets ("[Hype or Health](#)" and "[So, What is Normal?](#)")
- [Teacher Background](#)
- Food supplies if doing the optional tasting activity

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### Procedure

#### Pre-lesson

- a. Ask students to bring advertisements from magazines they typically read two days before teaching this lesson.
- b. Flip through them and select the ads you would like to use. Make sure you include a mix of ads targeting both boys and girls.

#### Learning Activity 1: Hype or Health? Media Advertisement Activity

- a. Start with an introductory class discussion:
  - What are some examples of communications media? (Film, radio, CDs, videos, TV, billboards, bus shelter ads, newspapers, magazines, direct mail, advertising, comic books, posters, etc...)
  - We are going to take a look at how body images are portrayed through the media and whether this is realistic or not.
- b. Divide students into groups. Distribute 3-4 ads to each group along with the Hype or Health activity sheets. Ask students to select one ad and discuss the questions on the activity sheet as a group. Then they will share their findings with the rest of the class.

*Some answers you would like to get from discussion include:*

- *It doesn't look very realistic.*
  - *What we see in the ads does not portray a realistic body image.*
  - *What is normal is not what you see in magazines or advertisements.*
- c. Use pictures throughout history to discuss how body shape preferences and cultural differences evolved to today's preferences.(optional)
  - d. Ask students if they can think of additional factors that pressure them to look a certain way (e.g. peer influences, parent influences, credible or non-credible websites...)

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### Learning Activity 2: Dove Fabricating Beauty clip

(about 4 minutes)

- Have students view the clip.
- Discuss with students:
  - What do they think about the clip?
  - What do they notice most?
  - Do boys feel the same about the ad as girls?
  - How do girls perceive boys and vice versa?
  - What attributes are they looking for when they like someone?

### Learning Activity 3: So, What is Normal?

- a. Ask students what they define as normal.
- b. Provide a definition of normal: it is a range of shapes and sizes and does not necessarily fit into a certain mold as shown by the media.
- c. Introduce the “So, What is Normal?” poster: it portrays teens with different shapes and sizes. Ask them to focus on body characteristics and not on how the teens look (i.e. skin, clothes, etc).
- d. Distribute student activity sheet “So, What is Normal?”.
- e. Have a class discussion about activity sheet questions and poster focusing on the different shapes represented. Recognize that adolescence is a time of rapid growth and body changes. Teen bodies are still changing and what is ‘normal’ for one teen may be very different for another one the same age. Keep discussions open and engaging as the topic may be sensitive for some students.
- f. Link magazines with poster.
  - Do you think the people in the ads are healthy? (We don’t really know just by looking at the ads BUT there are a lot of unhealthy behaviours like dieting, skipping meals, drugs, alcohol, smoking, lack of sleep, etc... that can make us unhealthy.)

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- g. What are the long term health implications of the unhealthy behaviours (extreme dieting and/or exercise) that people engage in to meet society's idea of a "preferred body"? (Most youth are aware that the people portrayed in the media as "desirable" aren't necessarily healthy, and that the preferred body weight isn't necessarily a healthy one. The problem is that most youth would also rather be popular than healthy. Make them feel proud of their healthy behaviours and healthy bodies.)
- h. Summarize this learning activity by stressing that we should respect and appreciate the genetic diversity of body shapes and sizes. We can be healthy regardless of our body shape. On the poster the teens are all different sizes and shapes but they are all healthy – they are eating well and keeping physically active, etc...

### Learning Activity 4: (Optional)

- a. Have students prepare a healthy snack (i.e. blender smoothies, yogurt parfaits) in class as a way to link healthy eating and lifestyle and to keep students engaged.

### Extension Activities:

- Divide class into small groups to discuss situations where they felt pressure from media or peers to fit the "perfect" body type. Have them share ways for dealing with these pressures. This could be part of a class discussion if students choose to. (The topic may be sensitive for some).
- Ask students to list and describe a range of strategies for attaining and maintaining emotional, physical and social health during puberty and adolescence (e.g., healthful eating, active lifestyle, strong self-esteem...).
- Have students pick one of the teen magazine advertisements and write a new slogan or redesign the ad to promote a realistic, positive body image. As a class, share the slogans or ads.
- Have students write a paragraph expressing their opinion:
  - "What does it mean to be healthy at any shape or size?"
  - Ask students to share their paragraph with the class.
- Have students list relevant health issues for teenagers of their age. Ask them to identify and describe the health services and agencies available in the local community that provide support and information for addressing these issues. Students will share their findings with the class.

This lesson is adapted from the Oregon Dairy Council's lesson "So, What is Normal?"

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## Student Activity

### Hype or Health?

In small groups, pick an ad and answer the following questions. Have one person in each group write down your answers. Designate one person to report back to the class.

1. What is common about the “look” of the people in the ads? Do they look real? Do they look like you and your friends? Are they portrayed in a negative or positive way?
2. What kinds of feelings or emotions are the ads trying to stir up? What do the ads want you to feel?
3. What is the ad saying? What does the ad want you to believe?
4. Who do these ads target most? Males or females?
5. How does the media influence how people feel about their body shape?
6. Will buying this product make you feel differently about your body?

# Health at Every Size: So, What's Normal? Student Activity

## So, What is Normal?

In small groups review the “So, What is Normal?” poster. Have one person in each group write down your answers. Designate one person to report back to the class.

1. What are some of your favourite activities? Are there activities that you like that are similar to what the teens on the poster like? If so, which ones?
2. What are some of your favourite foods? Are there foods that you like that are similar to what the teens on the poster like? If so, which ones?
3. What shapes and sizes are the teens in the poster?
4. What is the key message from the poster?
5. What are some of the characteristics that make up a healthy teen?
6. List 3 strategies that will make you feel good about yourself (physically, mentally, and socially)? Use the back of the page if you need more space.

# Health at Every Size: So, What's Normal?

## Teacher Backgrounder

Body image is a current issue for today's adolescents. Body image is how we picture ourselves and how we think others see us. Teen bodies are constantly changing during puberty. While this change is perfectly normal, it can feel overwhelming and out of control.

It is unrealistic to expect to be at society's image of an ideal weight and this can lead to problems. It is more realistic to expect to maintain a healthy weight. Healthy weight can be defined as the natural weight the body maintains through a healthy lifestyle.

A positive body image and self-esteem involve accepting your natural weight, body size and shape and making the most of it with a healthy lifestyle. This can be achieved by focusing on strategies to achieve emotional, physical and social well-being rather than focusing on body weight. While doing "[Learning Activity 2: Dove Fabricating Beauty clip](#)", you can help students build self-esteem by having them look at their personal attributes and what makes them unique (aspirations, talents...)

### What does "Health at Every Size" mean?

The "Health at Every Size" approach is a health-centred, rather than weight-centred approach, which focuses on the whole person, physically, mentally and socially<sup>1</sup>. This approach shifts the emphasis to living actively, eating in healthful ways, respecting each individual, and health and well-being for all at whatever size they may be<sup>1</sup>.

### Why focus on "Health at Every Size"?

When teens are bombarded with unrealistic images of the "ideal body" that promote thinness for women and large, muscular physiques for men, physical appearance and body shape become very important to most teens.

Many are unsatisfied with their weight and how they look, especially girls. Consider these statistics:

- Fewer than half of female students (43%) are satisfied with their appearance, compared to 57% of boys. And satisfaction decreases with age among girls, from 50% who are satisfied at age 13, to 41% at 15 and 17.<sup>2</sup>
- 50 percent of BC adolescents skip breakfast.<sup>2</sup>
- Almost half of Grade 10 girls in BC (45%) indicate they are on a diet or think they need to lose weight<sup>3</sup>. This reflects the enormous pressure on girls to conform to a thin norm presented in popular culture and media.

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Yet, we all come in different shapes and sizes. Genetics, or what we were born with, is the greatest influence on our body shape and size. We should accept our genetic predisposition (which is not in our control). Raising awareness of healthy body image is critical to the health and well-being of teenagers.

How can you help your students achieve a healthy body image? Many teens pick up words that describe how they look rather than characteristics such as smart, funny, shy, friendly. Harm can result when students receive messages that suggest their personal worth and the esteem of others is related to their body size. Rather, students should focus their energy and attention on what is within their power to achieve, which includes:

- Recognizing unhealthy cultural pressures
- Acknowledging that the concept of beauty is based on an individual's attitudes and personal characteristics rather than on external beauty
- Recognizing the risks of dieting

Students should also look for realistic role models that promote self-confidence and self-esteem. Research shows that self-esteem is the strongest contributing factor differentiating dieters from non-dieters.

Here are some strategies that can help your students develop a positive body image:

- Set appropriate goals for health, not for weight.
- Set goals for a nurturing environment that fosters self-esteem, body satisfaction, and a positive body image.
- Set goals for healthy eating. That includes taking time to relax, and enjoying food.
- Set goals for physical activity. That includes practicing activities that they enjoy for a total of one hour a day and limiting screen time to less than 2 hours a day.

<sup>1</sup> "Guidelines for Childhood Obesity Prevention Programs: Promoting Healthy Weights in Children". Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour, The Weight Realities Division of the Society for Nutrition Education, 35:1: 1-4, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> "Healthy Youth Development - Highlights from the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey". The McCreary Centre Society, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> "Young People In Canada: Their Health and Well Being", Chapter 7, Public Health Agency of Canada -Division of Childhood and Adolescence, William Boyce, 2004.



# Health at Every Size: So, What's Normal? Teacher Backgrounder

## Links and Resources

### [Jessie's Legacy](#)

BC eating disorder prevention

### [Kelty Mental Health](#)

Information and resources on mental health and substance use for BC children, youth, and families

### [The National Eating Disorder Information Centre](#)

Information and resources on eating disorders and food and weight preoccupation for Canadians

### [Media Smarts](#)

Canadian Centre for digital and media literacy

### [UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity](#)

US research and policy center

## More information for Teachers

### Curriculum Links

- Grades 6-9: This lesson supports the Big Ideas and Learning Standards in Physical and Health Education [BC curriculum](#) and can also link to other subject areas.
- Grades 10-12: This lesson supports Big Ideas, Competencies and Content in Applied Design, Skills and Technology, Physical and Health Education and other [BC curriculum](#) areas.

### Want to do more nutrition education with your class?

Explore our other [lesson plans](#) or book a [free 1-hour workshop](#).