

«Body image» is the picture you have in your mind of your size, shape and general appearance — and how you feel about it. Where does this image come from? Lifestyle adviser Anne Banks examines the issues.

Do you love what you see in the mirror? No? Then you are not alone. Almost everybody worries about what other people think, and we all get stressed out about the size of our feet or the shape of our nose.

It's the images we see in the media that are mostly to blame. (1)___ Whether it's a hunky actor in designer jeans and trendy jacket or a stunning model in an elegant dress, they're sending the same message: «If you look like me, your life will be perfect».

But appearances can be deceptive. Compare today's magazine covers with those of fifty years ago. (2)___ Not any more! Nowadays, blemishes are removed from photographs with the help of a technique called «airbrushing». A photographer or designer can straighten teeth, alter skin colour, and even change a hairstyle. That perfect face is just a trick of the camera after all!

The «perfect» body shapes aren't natural, either. Go down to any gym and you'll find young men «pumping iron» in an effort to live up to some masculine ideal that says that «real» men should be strong and muscular. Body builders, desperate to increase the size of their muscles, often eat food with far more calories and protein than is natural, which is a danger to their health. (3)___

It's the same for the girls. We all know of celebrities who go on starvation diets so that they can wear «size zero» clothes. They end up ruining their health. The irony is, naturally curvy girls who diet until they're stick-thin actually end up looking awful. Ask boys! (4)___ Unfortunately, some girls are so obsessed with their weight they just don't realise!

(5)___ These include pop singers like Mis-Teeq, Jamelia, and Rachel Stevens. Rachel Stevens doesn't want to be stick-thin. «There's always been this pressure to be skinny, but you've got artists now like J-Lo and Beyoncé who are really curvy and look absolutely stunning», she says.

So come on boys and girls, take control of your life! We hr mans come in all shapes and sizes and there's no «correct» to look. It's what you say and do that really matters. (6)___ They're not what they seem! Anyway, why waste your time trying to live up to somebody else's ideal? Being fit and healthy is far more important. Just believe in yourself! After all, if you like yourself as you are, everyone else will probably end up liking you, too!

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- 1 — Fortunately, some media stars are beginning to resist the pressure to look skinny.
- 2 — Forget the 'perfect' people you see pictured in the media.
- 3 — They often spend huge amounts of time and money trying to look good.
- 4 — Most of them prefer girls with a bit of shape.

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