Self esteem

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Summary

- Self-esteem is your opinion of yourself.
- Everyone lacks confidence occasionally but people with low self-esteem are unhappy or unsatisfied with themselves most of the time.
- It takes attention and daily practice to boost a low self-esteem.

Self-esteem is your opinion of yourself. People with healthy self-esteem like themselves and value their achievements. While everyone lacks confidence occasionally, people with low self-esteem feel unhappy or unsatisfied with themselves most of the time. This can be remedied but it takes attention and daily practice to boost self-esteem.

See your doctor for information, advice and referral if you’re having trouble improving your self-esteem or if low self-esteem is causing problems such as depression.

Characteristics of low self-esteem

Typically, a person with low self-esteem:

- Is extremely critical of themselves
- Downplays or ignores their positive qualities
- Judges themselves to be inferior to their peers
- Uses negative words to describe themselves such as stupid, fat, ugly or unlovable
- Has discussions with themselves (this is called ‘self-talk’) that are always negative, critical and self-blaming
- Assumes that luck plays a large role in all their achievements and doesn’t take the credit for them
- Blames themselves when things go wrong instead of taking into account other things over which they have no control such as the actions of other people or economic forces
- Doesn’t believe a person who compliments them.

Low self-esteem and quality of life

A low self-esteem can reduce the quality of a person’s life in many different ways, including:

- **Negative feelings** – the constant self-criticism can lead to persistent feelings of sadness, depression, anxiety, anger, shame or guilt.
- **Relationship problems** – for example they may tolerate all sorts of unreasonable behaviour from partners because they believe they must earn love and friendship, cannot be loved or are not loveable. Alternatively, a person with low self-esteem may feel angry and bully other people.
- **Fear of trying** – the person may doubt their abilities or worth and avoid challenges.
- **Perfectionism** – a person may push themselves and become an over-achiever to ‘atone’ for what they see as their inferiority.
- **Fear of judgement** – they may avoid activities that involve other people, like sports or social events, because they are afraid they will be negatively judged. The person feels self-conscious and stressed around others and constantly looks for ‘signs’ that people don’t like them.
- **Lack of self-care** – the person may care so little that they neglect or abuse themselves, for example, drink too much alcohol.
- **Self-harming behaviours** – low self-esteem puts the person at increased risk of self-harm, for example, eating disorder, drug abuse or suicide.

If at any time you are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a loved one, call Lifeline 13 11 14.

Causes of low self-esteem

Some of the many causes of low self-esteem may include:

- Unhappy childhood where parents (or other significant people such as teachers) were extremely critical
- Poor academic performance in school resulting in a lack of confidence
- Ongoing stressful life event such as relationship breakdown or financial trouble
- Poor treatment from a partner, parent or carer, for example, being in an abusive relationship
- Ongoing medical problem such as chronic pain, serious illness or physical disability
- Mental illness such as an anxiety disorder or depression.

Seek help for underlying self-esteem problems

Chronic problems can be demoralising and lead to self-esteem issues. Seek professional advice for problems such as relationship breakdown, anxiety disorder or financial worries.

Self-esteem building
Self-esteem is strongly related to how you view and react to the things that happen in your life. Suggestions for building self-esteem include:

- **Talk to yourself positively** – treat yourself as you would your best friend. Be supportive, kind and understanding. Don’t be hard on yourself when you make a mistake.
- **Challenge negative ‘self-talk’** – every time you criticise yourself, stop and look for objective evidence that the criticism is true. (If you feel you can’t be objective, then ask a trusted friend for their opinion.) You’ll realise that most of your negative self-talk is unfounded.
- **Don’t compare yourself to others** – recognise that everyone is different and that every human life has value in its own right. Make an effort to accept yourself, warts and all.
- **Acknowledge the positive** – for example, don’t brush off compliments, dismiss your achievements as ‘dumb luck’ or ignore your positive traits.
- **Appreciate your special qualities** – remind yourself of your good points every day. Write a list and refer to it often. (If you feel you can’t think of anything good about yourself, ask a trusted friend to help you write the list.)
- **Forget the past** – concentrate on living in the here-and-now rather than reliving old hurts and disappointments.
- **Tell yourself a positive message everyday** – buy a set of ‘inspirational cards’ and start each day reading out a new card and carrying the card’s message with you all day.
- **Stop worrying** – ‘worry’ is simply fretting about the future. Accept that you can’t see or change the future and try to keep your thoughts in the here-and-now.
- **Have fun** – schedule enjoyable events and activities into every week.
- **Exercise** – it is such a good boost to the brain for all kinds of things but especially in combatting depression and helping you to feel good. Targets need to be step by step, such as starting with a walk round the block once a day, enrolling at a local gym class or going for a swim.
- **Be assertive** – communicate your needs, wants, feelings, beliefs and opinions to others in a direct and honest manner.
- **Practise the above suggestions every day** – it takes effort and vigilance to replace unhelpful thoughts and behaviours with healthier versions. Give yourself time to establish the new habits. Keep a diary or journal to chart your progress.

**Seek out support to build self-esteem**

Further ways to build self-esteem include:

- Talk to a trusted friend or loved one about your self-esteem issues.
- Browse the Better Health Channel for further information.
- See your doctor for information, advice and possible referral.
- Read books on self-development.
- Take a course in personal development.
- Discuss your issues and get advice from a trained therapist.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Find a GP near you who specialises in mental health issues through the beyondblue website
- beyondblue Info Line Tel. 1300 22 4636
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 55 1800
- Suicide Helpline Victoria Tel. 1300 651 251
- Mental Health Foundation Tel. (03) 9427 0407, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
- Relationships Australia (Victoria) Tel. 1300 364 277

**Things to remember**

- Self-esteem is your opinion of yourself.
- Everyone lacks confidence occasionally but people with low self-esteem are unhappy or unsatisfied with themselves most of the time.
- It takes attention and daily practice to boost a low self-esteem.

**References**

- Self-esteem – feeling OK about who you are, Reach Out, Inspire Foundation, Sydney, More information here.
- The story on self-esteem, Kids Health US. More information here.

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More information

Healthy mind

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Healthy mind basics
- Healthy thinking
- Healthy mind throughout life
- Identity and relationships
- Getting help
- Goals, tips and tools
- Relaxation and alternative therapies
Healthy mind basics

- Exercise and mental health
  - We all know how important exercise is for keeping us physically healthy. But did you know that exercise can also help keep you mentally healthy? Research shows that people who exercise regularly have... 
  - Exercise and mood
    Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise... 
  - It’s okay to feel sad
    Sadness is a feeling that everyone experiences. It is part of life. We can respond to our sadness in ways that help us feel better... 
  - Monitoring your mood
    Most people know when they are feeling “in a mood”. But do you know what “mood” means? Or where your mood comes from? Or how to change your mood? Understanding your moods may help you work out what... 
  - Mood and sleep
    Getting enough sleep is vital. Long term sleep deficiency can affect your mood. You can improve your sleep quality... 
  - Talking through problems
    Kids and teenagers may be worried that adults won’t take their feelings seriously... 
  - Talking to health professionals about mental health issues
    Talking with a doctor or healthcare professional about your mental health issues will help you to feel comfortable and get the most appropriate treatment for your needs... 

Healthy thinking

- Assertiveness
  - It is helpful to imagine assertiveness as the middle ground between aggression and passivity... 
- Exercise and mood
  - Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise... 
- Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)
  - Worrying can be constructive if it helps you to work out possible solutions to a problem, but some people are troubled by excessive anxiety... 
- It’s okay to feel sad
  - Sadness is a feeling that everyone experiences. It is part of life. We can respond to our sadness in ways that help us feel better... 
- Look after your health at harvest time (slideshow)
  - Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness... 
- Negative emotions
  - Negative emotions can dampen our enthusiasm for life, depending on how long we let them affect us... 
- Rural issues - coping with stress
  - The effort of trying to provide for the family and keep the farm going can be intensely stressful... 
- Rural issues - suggestions for families in crisis
  - Financial hardship can increase the risk of workplace accidents on a farm... 
- Self-harm and self-injury
  - Self-harm and self-injury is when people hurt themselves on purpose, usually in response to intense emotional pain or negative feelings, thoughts or memories... 
- Stress
  - Stress affects people in different ways, but a balanced lifestyle can help you manage everyday stress... 
- Stress busters
Stress can affect your health and your life, so you need to know effective ways of dealing with your stress.

- **Strong relationships, strong health**
  
  Throughout your life, the number and strength of your relationships affect your mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of social connections and good mental health are numerous. Proven links...

- **Talking through problems**
  
  Kids and teenagers may be worried that adults won't take their feelings seriously...

- **Wellbeing**
  
  The quality of our personal relationships, not the size of our bank balance, has the greatest effect on our wellbeing...

### Healthy mind throughout life

- **Bullying**
  
  Parents can help with bullying by supporting their child and involving the authorities to find solutions...

- **Christmas can be stressful**
  
  The expense of gifts and food, the pressure of shopping, and the expectations of the season can make Christmas an extremely stressful time...

- **Exercise and mood**
  
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise...

- **Healthy ageing - stay involved**
  
  Reach out to the world around you for fun, a sense of achievement, social contact and mental stimulation...

- **Healthy ageing - stay mentally active**
  
  Researchers believe that many of the supposed age-related changes affecting the mind, such as memory loss, are actually lifestyle related...

- **Holiday stress**
  
  Holidays are supposed to offer relaxation and recuperation, but some people find them disappointingly stressful...

- **How to volunteer and boost your health (slideshow)**
  
  Volunteering is great for our health – it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process...

- **Internet safety for children**
  
  A child's digital footprint can be as easy to follow as their real footprints...

- **Meditation [infographic]**
  
  Mindfulness meditation has a range of benefits and can help clear your mind...

- **Pregnancy and your mental health**
  
  Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn’t stop when the baby...

- **Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)**
  
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- **Strong relationships, strong health**
  
  Throughout your life, the number and strength of your relationships affect your mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of social connections and good mental health are numerous. Proven links...

- **Tertiary studies - managing stress**
  
  Stress is a common issue for all tertiary students, but there are lots of ways to manage your stress...

- **Tertiary studies - mature age students**
  
  Returning to study as a mature age student presents many challenges and rewards...

- **Workplace conflict**
  
  A clash of personalities at work is bad for business, because it can affect productivity and increase absenteeism...

- **Work-related stress**
Work-related stress causes an increase in sick days and absenteeism, a higher turnover of staff and a drop in productivity.

- Year 12 exams - managing stress
  Help your child manage stress during exams by getting them to use good study habits, eat well, exercise, relax, sleep and keep things in perspective.

Identity and relationships

- Anger - how it affects people
  Well-managed anger can be a useful emotion that motivates you to make positive changes.

- Anger - tips to resolve arguments
  There are many people you can talk to who can help you overcome feelings of wanting to lash out.

- Body image and diets
  Some people diet because they have a poor body image, not because they want to be a healthy weight.

- Body image and young people - staying positive (video)
  The pressure on young girls and boys to be physically perfect is creating an epidemic of children and teenagers with low self-esteem and negative body image. Reporter Flip Shelton introduces us to the...

- Body image - men
  Homosexual men and athletes are particularly vulnerable to poor body image or feeling insecure about their bodies.

- Body image – tips for parents
  Give your child opportunities to appreciate their body for what it can do, rather than what it looks like.

- Body image - women
  The urge to diet or use other dangerous weight loss methods is almost always prompted by feeling unhappy with body shape or size.

- Family conflict
  It is normal to disagree with each other from time to time and occasional conflict is part of family life.

- Is my body normal? (Boys)
  Boys’ bodies come in all shapes and sizes. As you get older, and go through puberty, you become more aware of your body and how it compares with others.

- Is my body normal? (Girls)
  Puberty is a time when your body goes through lots of changes. It’s wonderful and exciting, and can sometimes feel overwhelming. This is the time your body changes from being a girl into being a woman.

- Making friends
  Friendships are an important part of life, but many of us find it difficult to find, make or keep friends.

- Peer pressure
  Peer groups can be a very positive influence on your teenager's life.

- Strong relationships, strong health
  Throughout your life, the number and strength of your relationships affect your mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of social connections and good mental health are numerous. Proven links.

Getting help

- Cognitive behaviour therapy
  Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) can help you change unhelpful or unhealthy habits of thinking, feeling and behaving.

- Counsellors
  Anyone who is struggling with a personal concern can seek help from a counsellor.

- Fighting your fears
  Fear is a natural human emotion, and is something that everyone experiences in their lifetime. What matters most is how you fight your fears, and whether you let them affect your life.

- It's okay to feel sad
Sadness is a feeling that everyone experiences. It is part of life. We can respond to our sadness in ways that help us feel better.

- **Mental health problems - early care helps**
  
  If emotional or behavioural problems are disrupting your life, it’s important to seek professional help early.

- **Pregnancy and your mental health**
  
  Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn’t stop when the baby.

- **Psychoanalysis**
  
  Psychoanalysis is a treatment based on the theory that our present is shaped by our past.

- **Strong relationships, strong health**
  
  Throughout your life, the number and strength of your relationships affect your mental and physical wellbeing. The benefits of social connections and good mental health are numerous. Proven links.

- **Talking through problems**
  
  Kids and teenagers may be worried that adults won’t take their feelings seriously.

- **Talking to health professionals about mental health issues**
  
  Talking with a doctor or healthcare professional about your mental health issues will help you to feel comfortable and get the most appropriate treatment for your needs.

**Goals, tips and tools**

- **10 tips for being assertive**
  
  Practise speaking in an assertive voice. 10 tips for being assertive.

- **10 tips to improve your mental fitness**
  
  The brain is like a muscle – if you don’t give it a regular workout, it loses tone. Here are some tips to help you improve your mental fitness: Exercise for 30 minutes every day. Physical.

- **10 tips to raise an optimistic child**
  
  Be a positive role model. 10 tips to raise an optimistic child.

- **10 tips to stay mentally healthy**
  
  Take a few tips to improve your health and wellbeing.

- **Fighting your fears**
  
  Fear is a natural human emotion, and it is something that everyone experiences in their lifetime. What matters most is how you fight your fears, and whether you let them affect your life.

- **How to volunteer and boost your health (slideshow)**
  
  Volunteering is great for our health – it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process.

- **Laughter clubs (video)**
  
  Laughter has some great health benefits such boosting your immune system, lowering your blood pressure and reducing stress.

- **Meditation [infographic]**
  
  Mindfulness meditation has a range of benefits and can help clear your mind.

- **Pregnancy and your mental health**
  
  Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn’t stop when the baby.

**Relaxation and alternative therapies**

- **Alexander technique**
  
  The Alexander technique stresses that movement should be economical and needs only the minimum amount of energy and effort.

- **Aromatherapy**
  
  The different smells and chemical constituents of aromatherapy oils can produce different emotional and physiological reactions.

- **Breathing to reduce stress**

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Many people use controlled breathing to help promote relaxation and reduce the effects of stress.

- **Fighting your fears**
  Fear is a natural human emotion, and it is something that everyone experiences in their lifetime. What matters most is how you fight your fears, and whether you let them affect your life.

- **Laughter clubs (video)**
  Laughter has some great health benefits such as boosting your immune system, lowering your blood pressure and reducing stress.

- **Meditation**
  Meditation techniques can promote a sense of calm and heightened awareness.

- **Meditation (infographic)**
  Mindfulness meditation has a range of benefits and can help clear your mind.

- **Pilates and yoga - health benefits**
  Yoga and Pilates both improve muscular and postural strength.

- **Pregnancy and your mental health**
  Finding out you are pregnant can be a very exciting time. But it can also make you feel uncomfortable, unwell, worried and make you wonder how you are going to cope. And it doesn’t stop when the baby...

**Health conditions and mental health**

- **Alcohol and drugs - dependence and addiction**
  Asking for help when you first suspect you have an alcohol or drug problem is important. If you think you have an addiction, speak to your local doctor or phone DirectLine...

- **Anxiety disorders**
  Anxiety disorders are common mental health problems that affect many people.

- **Dementia explained**
  Dementia is not a normal part of ageing and can happen to anybody.

- **Depression explained**
  The most important thing is to recognise the signs and symptoms and seek support.

- **Eating disorders**
  Eating disorders are a mental illness and can affect women and men of all age groups.

- **Exercise and mood**
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise.

- **Fighting your fears**
  Fear is a natural human emotion, and it is something that everyone experiences in their lifetime. What matters most is how you fight your fears, and whether you let them affect your life.

- **Mental illness explained**
  The relationship between stress and mental illness is complex, but it is known that stress can worsen an episode of mental illness.

- **Postnatal depression (PND)**
  Postnatal depression can happen either a few days or weeks after the birth, with a slow or sudden onset.

**Related Information**

- **Stress busters**
  Stress can affect your health and your life, so you need to know effective ways of dealing with your stress.

- **Talking through problems**
  Kids and teenagers may be worried that adults won’t take their feelings seriously.

- **Rural issues - coping with stress**
The effort of trying to provide for the family and keep the farm going can be intensely stressful...

- Rural issues - suggestions for families in crisis

Financial hardship can increase the risk of workplace accidents on a farm...

- Negative emotions

Negative emotions can dampen our enthusiasm for life, depending on how long we let them affect us...

Related information on other websites

- Centre for Clinical Interventions.

Content Partner

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