Self-Esteem

What is self-esteem?

Self-esteem is how you think and feel about yourself. If you usually like yourself and feel that you deserve good things in life, you have high self-esteem. If you generally dislike yourself or put yourself down, you have low self-esteem.

High self-esteem is important because when you are confident you usually get along better with other people and can get more done. High self-esteem can help you lead a fuller, more satisfying life. If you have low self-esteem, you may be afraid to try things that could bring you success. You may overeat, gamble, drink, or take drugs to make yourself feel better. You may distrust others and have problems getting along with friends and family.

You may have low self-esteem sometimes. For example, older adults sometimes have lower self esteem because they may feel they have nothing important to do or may feel a loss of control. At other times you may have high self-esteem—like when you reach some of your goals, such as doing well at a job or at school.

How can I tell if I have good self-esteem?

If you agree with these statements, your self-esteem is good:
- I do not feel I must always please other people or get their approval.
- I generally like myself.
- I speak up for myself and feel I have rights.
- I believe I can be a good person even if I'm not perfect.
- I do not need to prove that I am better than others.
- I feel good about myself without praise from others.

If you have low self-esteem, you:
- Put yourself down or do not know how to respond when you get a compliment
- Often feel guilty, even if you know something is not your fault
- Apologize all the time for everything
- Believe that you do not deserve things that others think you deserve
- Do not feel like you are a good parent, spouse, or child
- Have trouble setting limits or asserting yourself

How can I increase my self-esteem?

Ways to increase self-esteem include:
- Think of yourself in positive terms, such as "I am a kind and caring person." Replace criticism with praise. Be your own best fan. This helps you value yourself more.
- Focus on things you can do, things you are good at, and things that make you feel proud. Make a list of past successes and review it often.

- Set goals that are realistic. Make a plan to work toward your goals every day.
- If something goes wrong, remind yourself that you can make mistakes and still be a good person.
- Help others. Feeling like you are making a difference is a great self-esteem builder.
- Don't take yourself too seriously. Enjoy what you are doing and the people you are doing it with.
- Limit contact with social networking sites. Negative comments on these sites can lead to low self-esteem.
- Get support. Talk with family and friends. Just talking problems through will often make you feel better. Surround yourself with people who have a positive attitude.
- Take care of your physical health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a healthy diet. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, quit. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Exercise according to your healthcare provider's instructions.

If you have problems with respecting or liking yourself, talk to your healthcare provider or a therapist. Low self-esteem may be linked to depression or anxiety. Seeing a therapist may help you learn to manage your moods and feelings.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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