

# Body checking

## and avoidance

compare yourself to. Is it everyone you pass on the street? Or only those who you think are thinner than you? If you compare yourself to images in magazines, you may even be comparing yourself to bodies that don't exist—almost all such images are air-brushed.

### Body Avoidance

Some people find that they avoid looking at their body altogether, or alternate between periods of body checking and body avoidance. They might:

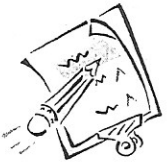
- Wear loose clothing
- Avoid looking at themselves in the mirror or when getting changed
- Avoid close physical contact with others
- Avoid swimming or some sports

Body avoidance is also unhelpful, because the focus on weight and shape is still there. Avoiding things that we fear also tends to make our fears worse—or at least keep them going. By avoiding your body, you do not have a chance to find out if your fears and predictions about your size are true.

### Reducing Checking and Avoidance

If you would like to reduce your body checking or avoidance behaviours, consider the following steps:

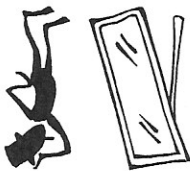
1. Determine the extent and frequency of your checking/avoidance. How many times each day do you look at your body in the mirror? Touch your stomach? Search for "fat"?
2. Choose 2 or 3 behaviours to target
3. Set some specific goals. You may want to work on:
  - Reducing (e.g., 3x/day instead of 6x/day)
  - Limiting (e.g., once per week instead of daily)
  - Eliminating (stopping altogether), and/or
  - Postponing (e.g., not checking your body until after work) your target behaviours
4. Start with easier goals and make changes gradually
5. Reward yourself for progress!
6. Check out our web-based resources for eating disorders (Overcoming Disordered Eating, Packs A and B) that include a module on Body Checking/Avoidance & "Feeling Fat".



### Body Checking

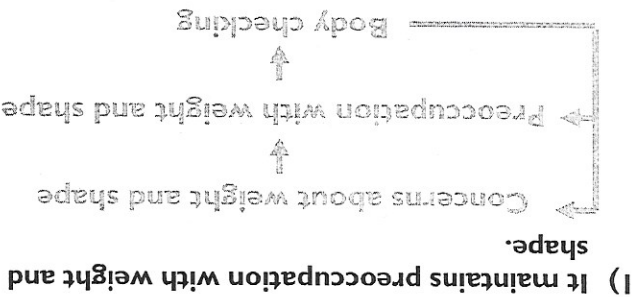
People who are very concerned about their weight and shape can spend a lot of time checking their body and appearance. For example, they may:

- Study themselves in the mirror repeatedly
- Compare their body to other people's
- Focus in on certain parts of their body
- Pinch their skin in an effort to detect fat
- Measure parts of their body, using hands or a tape measure
- Weigh themselves frequently (you may also refer to our handout on *Weekly Weighing*)



### Problems with Body Checking

Body checking is unhelpful for several reasons.



2) Bodies don't change that much within a few hours, but people's memories of how they looked and felt an hour ago are unreliable. This can make it easy to think "I look bigger" with little evidence for the notion.

3) People who are concerned about weight and shape tend to focus on parts of their body that they don't like. If you are constantly tuned in to and searching for signs of "fatness", then you will find them. Even the thinnest people in the world have some fat on their body!



4) For people with eating disorders, body perceptions may be distorted. The image you see when you look in the mirror is in part a product of what you expect to see. If your brain is expecting to see "fat thighs", you are likely to indeed "see" fat thighs.

5) Body comparisons can also be distorted. If you compare your body to others, consider who you