

**FAT**

**SMALL**

**SKINNY**

**TALL**

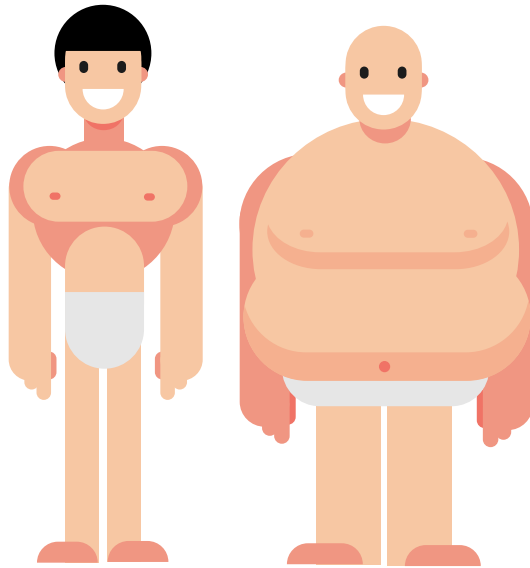
**BALD**

**SENSITIVE**

**WEAK**

# BEING MANLY

Why do males feel pressure to look a certain way?



**B**ody image is something that we all struggle with from time to time. It not only affects how we see ourselves, but it can affect our mental state and how we interact with other people.

Although body image affects us all, men in particular can sometimes struggle to talk about it openly due to the stigma that surrounds it.

The media portrays men as being big, strong, and lean. Men are exposed to stereotypes of masculine heroes, who are self-sufficient, strong and capable. Often the role of offering emotional support is not one associated with being manly and is therefore dismissed.

But the male body shape is much more than that. A lot of men suffer from body image factors such as weight, height issues and hair loss. All these issues can affect men's mental health.

According to the Movember Foundation, we lose on average one man to suicide every minute of every day worldwide, while a shocking one in eight UK men suffer from a diagnosed mental health condition. Men are

just not seeking help for their mental health concerns and something culturally needs to change.

**“Lads are meant to be big and strong and have loads of muscles. Obviously, this isn't a reality”**

Our body image has a huge influence on our mental health and young males are particularly affected by this. Josh Hawley, a 21-year-old sports marketer, told me about his struggle with learning to accept his body.

He said: “I've always been a big lad. I used to obsess over going to the gym. I'd go every day even when I didn't want to and it would really get me down sometimes. Although it's good for your health to go to the gym, going should never make your mental state worse”

When asked about what he thinks causes a negative body image, he said “we've just grown up with that image in our heads really. Lads are meant to be big and strong and have loads of muscles. Obviously, this isn't a reality, but every guy aspires for that on some level and it can be damaging to some people.”

Josh's story isn't uncommon; exercise addiction is just one of the self-destructive patterns that can be triggered by having a negative body image.

According to Better Health, body image is linked to self-destructive behaviour in men. A negative body image can lead to unhealthy habits, such as fad dieting, eating disorders, and even steroid abuse.

They state that a huge cause of negative body image in men is a cultural tendency to judge people on their appearance as well as advertising and social media campaigns that

emphasise male sports players and idealised celebrities.

To improve how you see your body image, they urge people to get informed by reading body image issues and develop reasons for exercising that are not dependent on appearance, such as stress release and improved concentration.

The strong link between our body image and our mental health is one we need to be aware of.

Furthermore, The Mental Health Foundation commissioned a survey looking at 4,505 UK adults to mark Mental Health Awareness Week.

It found that just over a third (34 percent) of UK adults have felt anxious or depressed because of issue relating to their body image.

One in eight (13 percent) of them had contemplated suicide because of body issue concerns.

According to the research, more men worry about their “body shape and appearance – beer bellies, “man boobs” or going bald – than women do about how they look.”

The issue of negative body image can be especially prevalent in younger males.

The rise of social media has further exacerbated how we see ourselves. Facebook, Instagram, and Tinder all exist to showcase

our bodies, looks, and lifestyle.

22-year-old Psychology graduate Adam Booth has said “It can be really toxic these days. Especially with Tinder and other dating apps out there. When I broke up with my girlfriend, I decided to try out some dating apps, but they all just made me feel awful about my body image. I hated the feeling of thousands of people were judging my body at their leisure.

**“I hated the feeling that thousands of people were judging my body at their leisure”**

He added that, “I still think day to day in my head that if I was thinner or more ripped, then I might be more successful or happier”

We only must look at sites and on TV and we are fed the image of “the perfect man” – he’s the alpha male, handsome, ripped, attractive and the guy who gets all of the girls.

It’s less about talking about who you are and more about how people see you.

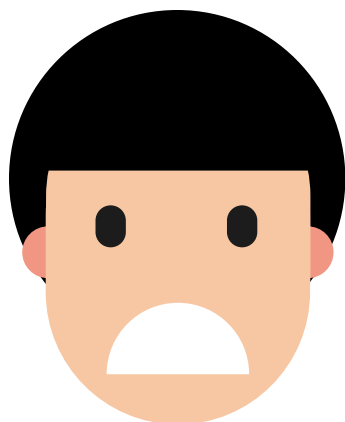
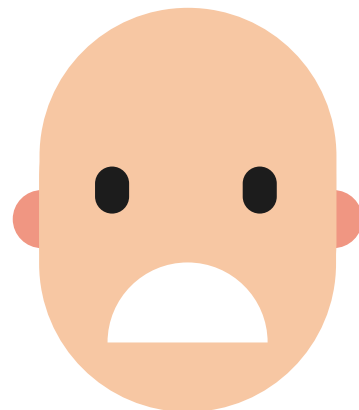
Men struggle to open up about how they feel a lot of the time too. We are taught to be tough and never really show our emotions. When we feel a bit down about our body, we don’t really speak up about it.

In recent years we’ve seen an explosion of body positivity and campaigns for women that open up conversations about diversity and feeling good in your own skin. It’s clear that men need to support each other too. We need more men’s advocates and men’s campaigns that can make a change in how we feel in our bodies.

Most importantly, we need to ensure that men feel comfortable enough to talk about their body image and their mental health. We need to start by changing the idea of “what makes a man”.

It is crucial that men are able to have conversations with other men about their mental health and feelings, because it is only when the idea of ‘what it means to be a man’ begins to change, that men will be able to open up about themselves.

**“I used to obsess over going to the gym. I’d go every day even when I didn’t want to”**



**“If I was thinner or ripped then I might be more successful and happier”**