

'START LIVING' CAMPAIGN FAQs

Why are you showing us ads about dying?

Death is confronting, but it's also inevitable. There is evidence to suggest that reflecting on death is an approach that helps people re-prioritise their life, and improve their body image. Death reflection is utilised in acceptance and commitment therapy, and other therapeutic interventions, where people are asked to write their eulogy and consider how they will be remembered. Similar to having a 'near-death experience', taking a moment to consider potential death can help people come back to their values and reflect on what is really important in their lives. Being prompted to remember that 'life is short' can encourage people, and particularly women, to be able to appreciate their bodies - for how they look, and for what they can do - regardless of whether they think they meet societal unrealistic beauty standards. In a [study](#) conducted by Dr Jessica Alleva, body appreciation improved among young adult women who reflected on their death. A second paper among men and women has been submitted for publication.

Are you saying we shouldn't care about how we look?

Not at all. Everyone is free to express themselves and show up in the world in the ways they want to. You are free to make choices about how you do your hair, whether you wear makeup, whiten your teeth, get cosmetic surgery - the list goes on. We would love for companies to stop using shame and judgment in the marketing of these services, but that's another story.

What is proposed here is that we shouldn't let the way we feel about our appearance hold us back from doing the things we want to do in our lives. When we asked the Body Image Movement community "What has hating your body cost you?", we got around 3000 responses and the (mostly) women who replied explained how the way they felt about their appearance had held them back from swimming and having fun at the pool or beach, making memories with their families and friends, and being in photos. Women explained the financial costs - the money they had poured into trying to change the way they look - and that they had stopped being intimate with partners and not gone for jobs or promotions because they didn't think they looked the part.

What we know from the research is that, when people consider themselves and their bodies to be more like objects on a shelf, that need to look a certain way to be appealing to others, they tend to focus more attention on changing their appearance which can lead to more negative health outcomes like depression and eating disorders.

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What we are suggesting is a subtle shift towards accepting and appreciating the way we look, and refocusing to consider what our bodies do for us - so that we can look after them.

But isn't it good for you to be a bit dissatisfied with your body?

Actually, body dissatisfaction is associated with lower engagement in health behaviours - people are less likely to do things like physical activity, engage in preventative cancer screenings, and even to wear sunscreen if they are dissatisfied with their bodies.

The new research is now showing that many negative health outcomes are more strongly linked to feeling shame about your body, instead of people's BMI or weight. This [meta-analysis](#) found a stronger association between weight stigma and poor mental health outcomes, and another one showed that weight stigma is associated with [lower engagement in health behaviours](#). This review showed that stigma is [associated with](#) diabetes risk, cortisol level, oxidative stress level, C-reactive protein level, eating disturbances, depression, anxiety, body image dissatisfaction, and that weight stigma leads to weight gain - not weight loss as was intended.

How does this campaign help kids?

This campaign is aimed at parents, and the people around young people, to make them more aware of the influence that their own body image might have on their children. Although many people blame social media for the majority of body image problems, research suggests that parents have a really big influence on their kids' body image - through indirect means like role modeling, and through more direct mechanisms, like what they say to their kids about their appearance.

A large [Australian study](#) found that while around 80% of adolescents indicated that their mothers and fathers had made positive comments about their weight and shape, 30% of 12-14 year olds and 50% of 16-18 year olds reported negative parental comments on weight/shape. Girls were more likely to report negative comments from mothers, and boys from fathers. Other research indicates that teasing and negative comments have a [long-lasting impact](#) on body image and disordered eating attitudes and behaviours - affecting young people [into their 30s and 40s](#). We must stop making negative comments about young people's appearance if we want them to be happy and healthy.

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Aren't higher weight people more likely to have health problems?

For the last 20 years, any news article about weight has started with "Obesity is associated with xyz health problems", so it's natural to make this assumption. However, as more research has been done in this space, we have found that these sorts of messages, that make people in larger bodies feel shame about their weight, are actually not helpful in supporting positive behaviour change. If we want people to be healthy, we can just encourage them to engage in health behaviours - there is no need to focus on weight.

Weight stigma and body shame are now known to be more strongly associated with negative health outcomes than weight. Large trials now show that feeling discriminated against based on your weight is independently associated with weight problems such as high blood pressure, thyroid disorders, arthritis, chronic pain and infertility.

In short, you can't tell how healthy someone is by looking at them. Everyone can engage in physical activity, eat in a balanced way, get enough sleep, hydrate and reduce their stress in order to improve health.

Did Tracey in the campaign video die from an eating disorder? This seems a little insensitive.

Eating disorders are serious psychological conditions that do unfortunately lead to death, however it was not our intention to infer that Tracey died from an eating disorder. There are many things she could have died from - but it's not about how she died, it's about how she lived. The intention of the campaign is to encourage reflection on how you want to be remembered, and how you want to live.

Where can I go for help and support?

Body image concerns and eating disorders can affect people of all ages, shapes and sizes, all ethnicities and across socioeconomic status. We don't specifically talk about eating disorders in this campaign, but if this content has made you more aware of some of the challenges you or someone else are experiencing, we encourage you to seek help. You can find details for support services on the next page.

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If you are concerned about your own or someone else’s body image and eating behaviours, you can call the **Butterfly National Helpline on 1800 33 4673**.

For more general mental health support, we recommend the Beyond Blue Support Service, which is available 24/7 for brief counselling. **Call a counsellor on 1300 22 4636 or visit beyondblue.org.au**.