



Caring Less About Your Looks

Module I

The Impact of Appearance Overconcern

Introduction	2
The Problem With Caring Too Much About Your Body & Appearance	2
Are You Too Concerned About Your Appearance?	3
The Impact of Appearance Overconcern	4
- Romantic, Family and Social Relationships	4
- Work and Study	4
- Emotional Wellbeing and Quality of Life	5
- Physical Health	5
- Finances	6
What to Expect From This Information Package?	6
Module Summary	7
About the Modules	8

This information provided in this document is for information purposes only. Please refer to the full disclaimer and copyright statements available at www.cci.health.gov.au regarding the information on this website before making use of such information.



Introduction

Most people feel dissatisfied with how they look from time to time, perhaps thinking that their thighs are too big, skin is too blemished, or that they are not tall enough. In fact, research studies looking into body image show that it is normal for women, and increasingly men, to experience some negativity towards their appearance. Most people also check the mirror to see how they look, change their hairstyle from time to time and use make-up or other products to 'improve' their appearance.

However, some people become so dissatisfied with their appearance that it starts to interfere with their life in a big way. Appearance concerns become so troubling that they impact on relationships, mood, finances and even health.

While it would be great if we could all feel super positive about our appearance all the time, we know that this just isn't realistic! For this reason, these modules are not designed to make you 'love' your body. Instead, they are about learning how to become more accepting of your appearance just as it is, and to lessen the impact of body image concerns on your day-to-day life.

In other words, these modules will help you to *care less about your looks* and *more* about valued and meaningful areas of your life.

The Problem with Caring Too Much About Your Body & Appearance

Just like a car, your body is a vehicle to get you where you need to go in life. Imagine if every time you drove your car you were caught up with thoughts about whether it was too big or too small, too old or too slow, and what others thought of it. How would this impact on where you went, what you did and how you felt? You might only drive at night or only in areas where you thought you wouldn't run into people you knew. When you did drive, you would probably get caught up in thoughts about whether others were judging your car as it passed them on the roads, leaving you feeling anxious, depressed and distracted. This could become a problem for you quite quickly, as it would make it difficult for you to get to where you want to go.

Caring **too** much about your appearance can have the same consequences. Being too concerned with your appearance – or what we call *overconcerned* - can really get in the way of how you live your life. Before we look at this in more detail, let's start by seeing whether you are currently overconcerned with your appearance by completing the questionnaire on the next page.





Are You Too Concerned About Your Appearance?

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
I feel very dissatisfied with one or more aspects of my appearance.				
Thinking about my appearance upsets me greatly.				
I check my appearance in the mirror or other reflective surfaces.				
I diet or exercise in an attempt to alter my body (e.g., to increase muscle mass, for weight loss).				
I hold my body in certain positions to hide aspects of my appearance.				
I compare my body with others (including on TV or social media).				
I spend time researching ways to change my appearance.				
I think about or have had cosmetic surgery.				
I avoid socialising because I am uncomfortable with my appearance.				
I avoid physical contact from others because I worry what they will think of my body (e.g., hugs, touch, sex).				
I avoid certain activities where I think others might judge my body (e.g., going to the gym, playing sport, dancing, meeting new people).				
When I socialise, I find it difficult to focus on the conversation because I am caught up in thoughts about my appearance.				
I spend a lot of time altering my appearance before leaving the house (e.g., make-up).				
I use dietary products (i.e. protein powders, cleanses, muscle building supplements) to alter my body.				
I scrutinise my appearance in photos, and/or edit the way I look before sharing photos with others.				

If you answered *Often* or *Very Often* to many of the above questions, it may suggest you are overconcerned with your appearance, and that such concerns are having a negative impact on your life. Let's explore this further.



The Impact of Appearance Overconcern

Romantic, Family and Social Relationships

If you are worried about people judging your appearance negatively, it can interfere with your relationships in a big way. For example, you may find that you socialise less, or only catch up with friends after you spend a lot of time on your appearance (e.g., applying make-up, doing your hair). You may also find yourself avoiding romantic relationships or sex and other forms of intimacy (such as hugs or kissing). Limiting contact with friends and having fewer opportunities for fun and positive interactions may leave you feeling sad and lonely.



Preoccupation with your appearance may also get in the way of the enjoyment you get out of spending time with family and friends. For example, when you do catch up with people, you may find it hard to stay present and enjoy the experience if you're always worried about how you look.

Finally, you may notice that your family and friends become frustrated when you want to talk about your appearance a lot, particularly if they struggle to understand why these concerns are so important to you. This may cause you to feel let down or a bit irritated with them if they struggle to understand what you're going through or if they can't help you find a solution.

Take a moment to write down how your appearance concerns are affecting your relationships.

Work and Study



Time and effort spent worrying about your appearance may get in the way of work or study. You may find it difficult to focus on tasks, and everyday jobs may take longer to finish. Going into work or to classes may lead to anxiety, particularly if you believe that others are judging your appearance negatively. Because of this, you may find yourself calling in sick to work or not attending classes, which, in turn, can make it difficult for you to pursue your goals.

In what ways do your appearance concerns impact on your work or study?



Emotional Wellbeing and Quality of Life

Being preoccupied with your appearance can negatively affect your emotional wellbeing. If you are very dissatisfied with the way that you look, you may feel depressed, anxious, embarrassed or even ashamed. When you feel this way, you may find yourself withdrawing from social situations or pleasant activities, especially when you feel uncomfortable in your body, or where you believe your appearance may be negatively judged by others (e.g., going to the beach, going to the gym, playing team sports or dressing up to go out). Withdrawing can lead to further depressed mood as you limit your opportunities for fun and positive experiences. As such, your life can become very limited and unfulfilling.



What are you missing out on because of your appearance concerns?

How do your appearance concerns impact on your mood, and your life in general?

Physical Health

Some people engage in behaviours that can be physically harmful when trying to improve their appearance. Behaviours such as dieting, overexercising, vomiting and laxative misuse can be very damaging to physical health. Many people engaging in these behaviours experience low energy, poor sleep, hair loss and compromised functioning of their vital organs and hormone production.

If you are engaging in any of these behaviours, we strongly encourage you to see your physician for regular medical monitoring. You can also read our modules: “*Overcoming Disordered Eating*” or the many handouts available on the CCI website, some of which are listed below:

1. Starvation Syndrome
2. Eating Disorders: What Are The Risks?
3. Laxative Misuse
4. Vomiting and Your Health
5. Unhealthy Exercise

Do you engage in any potentially harmful behaviours in order to change your body? What do you notice happens to your body when you are using these behaviours?



Finances



The cost of cleanses, health retreats, gym memberships, muscle building supplements and cosmetic products/procedures can quickly add up to hundreds or even thousands of dollars over time. For some people, overconcern about their appearance may result in them often missing work, which can add to these financial pressures.

How do your appearance concerns impact on your finances? How much money have you spent trying to address your dissatisfaction?

As you are working through this module you may be starting to realise just how preoccupied you are with your appearance, and how much this is impacting on your life and wellbeing. Over the next 6 modules, you will learn more about how your appearance concerns are holding you back, and will be taught skills to minimise their impact on your quality of life.

What to Expect From This Information Package?

This information package is designed to help you begin to reduce your concern and preoccupation with your appearance, and to address any unhelpful behaviours that keep these concerns going.

We have begun with a discussion about the impact that your appearance concerns are having on your life. In the next module, we will explore and discuss what factors keep you focused on and concerned about your appearance. Later we will focus on ways to address appearance concerns head on.

The following modules make up this information package:

- Module 1: The Impact of Appearance Overconcern
- Module 2: What Keeps Appearance Concerns Going?
- Module 3: Appearance Focused Attention
- Module 4: Body Checking & Reassurance Seeking
- Module 5: Appearance Altering Behaviours
- Module 6: Avoidance & Safety Behaviours
- Module 7: Overvaluing Appearance & Self-Management Planning

When using self-help materials, some people might skip sections or complete things in a different order. The modules in this information package have been designed to be completed in the order they appear. We recommend that you work through the modules in sequence, finishing each module before moving on to the next one in the series. We believe that by doing this, you will maximise the benefits you might receive from working through this information package.

We encourage you to take the journey through these modules and hope that you will come away feeling more accepting of yourself, and hence get back to living the life you want. You might find that it gets a little tough at times, but we encourage you to stick with it and keep on working through these modules until you reach the end. See you at the next module!



Module Summary

- It is normal to experience some degree of dissatisfaction with your appearance from time to time.
- Being overly concerned about your appearance can lead you to feel depressed, anxious and ashamed.
- Overconcern with appearance can get in the way of your relationships and day-to-day life. It can impact on how you socialise and take part in activities such as work, study or hobbies. It may also add to financial stress, as trying to change your appearance can be very expensive.
- While it is near impossible to 'love' the way you look all the time, it is certainly possible to learn how to become more accepting of your appearance and to lessen the impact of appearance concerns on your quality of life. You can start by working through these modules!



Coming up ...

In the next module, we will look at the factors that maintain your appearance concerns.



About the Modules

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Louise Andony (DPsych¹)
Clinical Psychologist
Centre for Clinical Interventions

Dr. Stephanie Hill (DPsych¹)
Clinical Psychologist
Centre for Clinical Interventions

Dr. Bronwyn Raykos (MPsych²; PhD³)
Senior Clinical Psychologist
Centre for Clinical Interventions

Dr. Bruce Campbell (MPsych²; DPsych¹)
Senior Clinical Psychologist
Centre for Clinical Interventions

¹Doctor of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) ²Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) ³Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology)

BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in these modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT).

REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package:

Cash, T. (1997). *The body image workbook*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.

Fairburn, C.G. (2008). *Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Eating Disorders*. New York: Guilford Press.

Waller, G., Cordery, H., Corstorphine, E., Hinrichsen, H., & Lawson, R. (2007). *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Eating Disorders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, A. (1997). *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: A Practice Manual and Conceptual Guide*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Wells, A. (2008). *Metacognitive Therapy for Anxiety and Depression*. New York: Guilford Press.

Veale, D. (2010). Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Body Dysmorphic Disorder. *Psychiatric Annals*, 40, 333-340.

Veale, D., Willson, R., & Clarke, A. (2009). *Overcoming body image problems including Body Dysmorphic Disorder*. London: Robinson.

Veale, D. & Neziroglu, F. (2010). *Body Dysmorphic Disorder: A treatment manual*. UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

“CARING LESS ABOUT YOUR LOOKS”

This module forms part of:

Andony, L., Hill, S., Raykos, B., & Campbell, B. (2019). *Caring less about your looks*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

ISBN: 0 9875479 3 4

Created: December 2019