



RAINBOW RESOURCE CENTRE
SERVING MANITOBA'S GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND TWO-SPIRIT COMMUNITIES

The Rainbow Resource Centre is a non-profit, community based charitable organization that serves as the central agency offering support, information, counselling, referrals, library, and public awareness on issues related to sexual orientation, gender diversity, and anti-homophobia education.

The Rainbow Resource Centre envisions and works toward an equal and diverse society, free of homophobia and discrimination, by encouraging visibility and fostering health and self-acceptance through education, support, resources, and outreach.

Peer Support/Info Line:

(204)284.5208 or 1.888.399.0005

(Toll free in Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario)

Monday to Friday: 7:30—10:00 pm
(subject to volunteer availability)

Counselling (204) 452.7508

counselling@rainbowresourcecentre.org

Street: 170 Scott Street
(corner of Scott and Wardlaw)

The Rainbow Resource Centre is open:

Wednesday—Friday: 1:00 pm to 4:30 pm

Monday—Friday: 7:30 pm to 10:00 pm

(subject to staff and volunteer availability)

Please visit our website:

www.rainbowresourcecentre.org

Body Image & Gay Men

*For individuals who want to
learn more about it*

Information adapted from The Centre (Vancouver) - 2007

BODY IMAGE & GAY MEN

BODY IMAGE is a serious health concern in the gay men's community. An appearance centred culture filled with drastically unrealistic images of male physical beauty can have an impact on how many gay and bisexual men feel about themselves. For some men, this may result in poor self-esteem and depression, eating disorders, compulsive exercising, and steroid use.

While women are typically subject to sexist pressures of 'body idealness' by men; gay and bisexual men also experience these pressures in order to gain acceptance, self-esteem and affirmation of perceived attractiveness.

A 'body perfect' culture in the gay men's community exists for many complex reasons. One suggestion is to deal with public stereotypes that all gay men are perceived as effeminate. Another suggestion may be a result of displaced internalized homophobia where gay men feel the need to prove that they are indeed worthy, successful and desirable. Lastly, for those living with HIV, a perfect muscle-bodied look may be a way to regain control of their bodies, and feel empowered and attractive.

For these reasons and others, masculine gym-built bodies became the standard for being physically attractive and sexually desirable in the gay men's community.

The challenges now lie in building a community in which gay men of all shapes and body types, ages, cultures and identities are acknowledged and valued.

Health & Body Image

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be in good health regardless of your body shape and size (note: a thin body doesn't necessarily indicate good health or habits). Body concerns only become unhealthy when the need to change your appearance begins to interfere or undermine your social relationships, your performance at school or work, or create emotional distress (anxiety, depression) and/or physical health problems.

Eating Disorders

Recent studies suggest that 10% of all eating disorder cases are males. It also appears that the majority of these cases are gay men. While eating disorders most often develop during teen years, boys as young as 8 and men as old as 60 have been affected.

Eating disorders in men, as in women, are not about food, but about other aspects in their life. Eating disorders may develop as a way of coping with stress, low self-esteem, conflicts, and pressures of life.

If you or a friend are struggling with an eating disorder, for information and help, contact the Eating Disorders Treatment and Prevention Group of Manitoba at (204) 989.0757.

Compulsive Exercise

The compulsive exerciser is no longer free to choose – exercise becomes necessary and essential. While temporary feelings of well being or even euphoria may result, the compulsive exerciser can experience overwhelming feelings of guilt and anxiety when the opportunity to work-out is denied.

STEROID USE

While some men take steroids for a legitimate health problem, a growing number of gay men are using anabolic steroids to gain muscle mass (bulk up) that would be impossible without the use of chemical assistance.

In addition to concerns about impurities of steroids bought on the 'street', anabolic steroid use can result in increased risk of heart disease, liver problems, change in blood pressure/stroke, and prostate cancer. Some people also experience severe mood disorders, aggression and rage, and impaired judgment.

Whether you are thinking about trying steroids, or are currently using them, it is important you consider the risks associated with steroid use. If there is someone you trust, try talking about some of these issues with them.

If you want to make some changes without stopping steroid use completely, consider reducing the number and length of cycles, or using less potent steroids. Consider talking to your doctor about your usage, and have liver enzyme and blood tests during your cycles of use.

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

Individuals with body dysmorphic disorder worry irrationally about their appearance – their hair is thinning, their nose is too big, their skin is marked – or something else is wrong with how they look. Concerns about appearance cause significant distress and reassurances that they look good are met with skepticism.

Clues to Body Dysmorphic Disorder

- Constantly comparing your appearance with that of others; intensely scrutinizing the appearance of others
- Often checking your appearance in mirrors or other reflective surfaces
- Using drugs to become more muscular or to lose weight
- Avoiding mirrors
- Excessive exercising or dieting
- Avoiding social situations in which perceived flaws may be exposed
- Seeking surgery, or other medical treatment when doctors or others tell you that such treatments are not necessary

Body Dysmorphic Disorder can greatly impact your self-esteem, self-worth, eating habits, and even your professional and social life. It is important to recognize the symptoms and consider talking to a peer supporter or counsellor to help cope with the issues and redefine a healthier body image.

8 STEPS TO BETTER BODY IMAGE

1. Avoid buying health, fitness, and male fashion magazines that encourage unhealthy ideals. Love your body, not theirs.
2. Recognize that bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. There is no one 'right' body size.
3. Remind yourself that your body size, shape, or weight does not determine your worth as a person, or your identity as a gay man.
4. Be aware of the negative messages you tell yourself about your appearance.
5. Focus on qualities in yourself that you like that are not related to your appearance.
6. Find friends who are not overly concerned with weight or appearance.
7. Look critically at the advertisements that push the 'body perfect' message. Our culture emphasizes the V-shaped muscular body shape as ideal for men. Work not towards a 'perfect' male body, but rather one that is healthy.
8. Demonstrate respect for men who possess body types or who display personality traits that do not meet cultural standards for masculinity.

LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Men's Resource Centre:

Intake phone line: 956.9528 or
Toll free: 1.866.672.3422
www.elizabethhill.ca/mrc.html

Klinic Community Health Centre

24 Hour Crisis Line:

(204)786.8686

Toll free 1.888.322.3019

TTY 784.4097

www.klinic.mb.ca

Nine Circles Community Health Centre:

(204)940.6000 or

Toll free 1.888.305.8627

www.ninecircles.ca

SERC (Sexuality Education Resource Centre):

(204)947.7800 (Winnipeg)

(204)727.0417 (Brandon)

www.serc.mb.ca

SUGGESTED READINGS

<http://gaylife.about.com/healthfitness/a/bodyimage.htm>

[www.gay.com/fitness/article.html?
sernum=3213&navpath=channels/fitness](http://www.gay.com/fitness/article.html?sernum=3213&navpath=channels/fitness)

[www.vpul.upenn.edu/ohe/library/bodyimage/
bibliography](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/ohe/library/bodyimage/bibliography)

Luciano, L. (2001). *Looking good: Male body image in modern America*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Pope, H.G., Phillips, K.A., & Olivardia, R. (2000). *The Adonis Complex*. New York: Free Press.

Watson, J. (2000). *Male Bodies: Health, culture, and identity*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
