

Lesson 2: Stress and Body Image

Introduction

This lesson helps students to gain an understanding of common mental health issues related to stress and poor body image. Students have the opportunity to increase their self-awareness of stressful situations and to understand that the ways in which people react to stress may vary. Using exercise for dealing with stress is addressed as well.

NOTE TO TEACHER

The following content related to stress and body image should be treated with sensitivity. Potentially sensitive content is to be treated in ways that are appropriate for the local school, school division, and community context.

Students also examine common questions about body image and the factors that affect body image. This lesson explains the relationship between eating and body image. It also allows students to examine media influences on people's body image and behaviour.



Specific Learning Outcomes

- 11.MH.1** Identify and apply positive health strategies to deal with issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.
- 11.MH.2** Examine media influence(s) on self-image and behaviour.
- 11.MH.3** Investigate the impact and importance of active healthy lifestyle practices on mental-emotional health issues.



Key Understandings

- Mental-emotional health is a critical component of overall well-being.
- Healthy lifestyle practices, including physical activity participation, support positive mental-emotional health and reduce stress.
- Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- People who have a positive body image tend to demonstrate more healthy eating behaviours than those who have a negative body image.



Essential Questions

1. How does exercise help reduce stress?
2. What are the connections between body image and mental health? Explain.



Background Information

Dealing with Stressful Situations

Stress can be defined as the body's normal physiological response to situations or stimuli perceived as "dangerous" to the body (Stressfocus.com). The ways in which people react to stress can vary greatly.

Healthy lifestyle choices have a positive impact on our ability to cope with stress and to manage day-to-day activities. Everyone can learn skills to cope with stress that contribute to optimal mental health. Making healthy behaviour choices and seeking support when needed helps us lead a balanced life.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Stressful Situations

Discuss with students the definition of *stress*. Emphasize that stress can cause powerful feelings, as well as biological changes in the body. Allow students to brainstorm some feelings and biological changes that stress can cause. Write their responses on a board or chart. Student suggestions will likely include ideas related to the "fight or flight" theory of stress response. This theory has already been introduced to students in earlier grades.

Using the active learning strategy Carousel Brainstorming (see Appendix E), arrange students into six groups. Position each group in an area of the classroom and tape a sheet of poster board to the wall by each group. Each poster should feature one of the following headings:

- Situations That Make Me Angry
- Situations That Make Me Frustrated
- Situations That Make Me Worry
- Situations That Make Me Happy
- Situations That Take a Lot of Time
- Situations That Take Money

NOTE TO TEACHER

Remind students that responses must be appropriate (e.g., do not make sexual references), safe, ethical, and not hurtful to others.

Tell each group they have one to two minutes to write down their responses to the situation identified on the poster in front of them. Teachers may choose to play music (something lively) while students are engaged in the learning activity.

When the designated time is up, have students move to the poster to their right. Allow two more minutes for students to respond to the situation identified on the poster that is now in front of them.

Continue rotating until each group has had a chance to write their responses to the situations on all six posters. Then have a spokesperson from each group read the responses on the poster in front of them. Discuss similarities, insights, or perceptions related to the ideas listed. Talk about which responses are *positive* stressors and which are *negative* stressors.

Have students return to their seats. As a class, brainstorm appropriate and healthy strategies to cope with the stressful situations they wrote about. Students take notes on those strategies.

REFERENCES



For more information on stress, refer to the following websites:

Columbia St. Mary's MedicalMoment.org. "Gender Differences in Behavioral Responses to Stress: 'Fight or Flight' vs. 'Tend and Befriend.'" 2003.

<www.medicalmoment.org/content/healthupdates/dec03/187868.asp>.

Stressfocus.com. "Discover the Basics of Stress." 14 July 2007.

<www.stressfocus.com/stress_focus_article/stress-and-its-causes.htm>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at

<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Background Information

Stress Can Be Positive or Negative

A certain level of stress is not a bad thing and can in certain situations contribute to optimum performance. If a person is under too little stress, it will be difficult to become self-motivated to perform well. Too little stress can express itself in feelings of boredom and not being challenged. An optimum level of stress can bring benefits of alertness and activation.

Excessive levels of stress, in sport for example, can hamper performance and enjoyment. These excessive levels of stress occur when

- what is asked of us is beyond our perceived abilities
- too much is asked of us in too short a space of time
- unnecessary obstacles are put in the way of achieving our goals

In sport performance, negative stress

- gets in the way of good judgement and fine motor control
- causes competition to be seen as a threat, not a challenge
- damages the positive frame of mind needed for high-quality competition by
 - promoting negative thinking
 - damaging self-confidence
 - narrowing attention
 - disrupting flow
- consumes mental energy (e.g., in worry) that could be devoted to focusing on effective technique

Very often stress can be caused by negative thinking. We are more likely to do well if we take a positive perspective, seeing a new situation as an opportunity to exhibit skills at a higher level, than if we approach or interpret a new or difficult situation by saying, "I'm in trouble."

Exercise and Stress

Many people use exercise as their primary stress-management strategy. Regular exercise can remove by-products of the stress response or help release emotions. Bouts of physical activity allow muscles to release their stored energy and to return to resting state, which reduces tension. The endorphin hormone is released as a result of exercising, which is known to affect mood and promote a sense of elation or joy.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Physiological Responses of Exercise

Have students use various websites or other resources to investigate the physiological responses of exercise, which in turn could reduce stress, and report their findings to the class using index cards. Students put a physiological response (short title) on one side of an index card and the explanation of the response on the other. Use these class cards in games such as scavenger hunts, people search, and so on.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Teachers are advised to

- review websites before recommending them to students
- check school/division policy regarding appropriate Internet use

REFERENCE



The following is an example of a useful website for this learning activity:

Randolfi, Ernesto A. "Exercise as a Stress Management Modality." *Optimal Health Concepts*. <www.OptimalHealthConcepts.com/ExerciseStress.html>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Wellness Inventory

Ask students to complete a wellness survey (such as RM 4–MH) to increase their self-awareness of stressful situations or behaviours they may encounter on a given day. Ask them to complete the same survey at different times during the course and compare results, or have them reflect on whether or not their responses would be the same or different from day to day.

Using a Think-Pair-Share strategy (see Appendix E), have students think about what question may concern them and, in pairs, discuss ways to improve in that area.



Refer to RM 4–MH: Wellness Inventory.

REFERENCE



For ideas on coping with stress, refer to appropriate websites, such as the following: mindyourmind.ca. <www.mindyourmind.ca>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Background Information

Body Image

Body image is linked to self-esteem and self-concept and is shaped by past experiences, whether these are positive (such as athletic performance) or negative (such as abuse, disability, or bullying). Body image can be a concern for boys and girls no matter what their actual bodies look like. Body image is linked to how we cope with both past and present experiences and is much more complex than our weight, height, or muscle mass. It is important not to assume that a large-bodied teenager will have a negative body image and a slim-bodied teenager will have a positive body image.

Students are often interested in discussing body image, and may steer discussions to their body size, body parts, ideal body types, and so on. To avoid a power struggle, avoid getting caught up in debates over the “right body type,” “ideal body weight,” or issues related to obesity prevention. When discussing body image with adolescents it is important to keep the focus off individual or optimal body size or weight, knowing that body image is actually related to how we feel about our bodies and our life experiences.

What Is Body Image?

Our body image begins to form at an early age and can be influenced by our parents, caregivers, peers, and life experiences. We often think of body image in terms of physical appearance, attractiveness, and beauty. Our body image relates to how we feel about our bodies and what we think our bodies look like to others. In some cases, our perspectives may not be objective.

Remember that every body is different. We all have different genetics, which influence our facial features, body shape, height, and weight. Even if everyone ate the same things and did the same amount of exercise, we still would not all look the same.

The ideal body weight is the weight that allows us to feel strong and energetic and lets us lead a healthy life. Someone with a healthy body has the energy, for example, to spend time with friends, participate in sports, and concentrate on school or work. Encourage students to avoid comparing their bodies with those of their friends or the people shown in advertisements and on television. Students don't need to rely on charts, formulas, or tables to dictate what the right body weight is for them. Instead, they need to eat balanced meals full of nutritious foods and participate in moderate to vigorous exercise regularly.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Common Body Image Questions

As a strategy to activate student thinking, place a set number of questions about body image in a bag (see RM 5–MH). Have the corresponding number of groups pick a question for group discussion. Ask students in each group to identify a chairperson, a recorder, and a reporter in preparation for reporting their responses to the selected questions to the class.



Refer to RM 5–MH: Common Questions about Body Image for examples of common questions that students may have about body image, as well as suggested responses to the questions.



Background Information

How Big Is the Body Image Problem?

Poor body image increases the risk for extreme body/weight control behaviours. Researchers have found that increased preoccupation with appearance and body dissatisfaction put people at greater risk for engaging in dangerous practices to control weight and size (e.g., extreme dieting and exercise compulsion). These behaviours can lead to more harmful behaviours that can put an individual at risk for developing disordered eating or an eating disorder.

CANADIAN STATISTICS ON EATING DISORDERS

- A recent study showed that 27% of Ontario girls 12 to 18 years old are engaged in disordered food and weight behaviour (Jones, et al).
- Eating disorders are now the third most common chronic illness in adolescent girls (Adolescent Medicine Committee).
- Health Canada found that almost one in every two girls and almost one in every five boys in Grade 10 either was on a diet or wanted to lose weight (King, Boyce, and King, Chapter 7).

How Do Positive and Negative Body Image Differ?

We have a positive body image when we have a realistic perception of our bodies and enjoy them just as they are. Positive body image involves understanding that healthy, attractive bodies come in many shapes and sizes, and that physical appearance says very little about our character or value as a person. Having a healthy body image means that we keep our assessment of our bodies separate from our sense of self-esteem, and it ensures that we don't spend an unreasonable amount of time worrying about food, weight, and calories. The adoption of an active healthy lifestyle has a positive impact on our attitudes towards our bodies.

Negative body image can cause more serious disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder and muscle dysmorphia:

- **Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)** is an over-preoccupation with an “imagined” physical defect in appearance (that is, an individual thinks there is a problem with an aspect of his or her body that others don’t see). The most common focus of preoccupation is the nose, skin, or hair, but other body parts can also be the focus. This disorder can cause stress for the individuals who have this problem, as well as for family and friends around them. In addition to spending a lot of time obsessing about a feature of their body or body parts, individuals with BDD experience anxiety and/or depression, and they may avoid social situations. People have been known to try plastic surgery to “fix” the problem but end up worse off because the underlying reason for the preoccupation is not treated.
- **Muscle dysmorphia** (sometimes referred to as **bigorexia**) is the over-preoccupation with the perception or feeling that one’s muscles are too small or too weak. In an attempt to avoid this self-perception, individuals with this disorder often spend unrealistic amounts of time working out in the gym, and yet they don’t feel “good enough.” Muscle dysmorphia occurs most often in men but has been known to occur in women as well.

With the right supports, both disorders are treatable.

What Are Some Factors That Affect Body Image?*

Body image, whether negative or positive, is shaped by a variety of factors:

- Body image is influenced by standards set by society and the culture that surrounds us. As well, comments from family, friends, and others about our bodies, their bodies, and other people’s bodies, both positive and negative, affect body image.
- Self-esteem has an impact on how we view our bodies and is related to how we evaluate our own physical abilities, job skills, interpersonal abilities, family role, and body image.
- Low self-esteem may develop if “ideal” body standards are not met and may result in size misperceptions, faulty beliefs about body shape, and negative feelings about one’s own body.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BODY IMAGE *

- People with positive body image exhibit
 - self-confidence, energy, vitality, and positive self-appraisal
 - feelings of attractiveness and beauty
 - trust and respect for their bodies
 - freedom of expression with their bodies, not dependent on weight
- People with negative body image describe
 - dissatisfaction with their physical appearance
 - a belief that their appearance is being scrutinized and evaluated by others
 - excessive emphasis on physical appearance in how they evaluate themselves
 - distressing preoccupation with their bodies
 - feelings of shame and/or embarrassment

* Source: Sheena’s Place. “Body Image.” *Education and Outreach*. <www.sheenasplace.org/index.php?page=body_image>. Adapted with permission.

- Negative body image may develop or be influenced by a history of abuse (physical or sexual), teasing by friends or family, life changes such as moving to a new school or city, and any physical changes that may be a result of puberty, medical problems, surgery, or sports injuries. Exposure to images of idealized versus normal bodies may also have a negative impact on body image.
- Experiencing problems with body image and body dissatisfaction place individuals at risk for the development of an eating disorder.
- Individuals with anorexia or bulimia nervosa often perceive themselves as being larger than they actually are, resulting in negative body image and an increase in dieting behaviour.
- An increase in dieting behaviour is associated with depression, decreased self-confidence, increased feelings of anxiety, feelings of unattractiveness, and persistent concern about weight. In other words, negative body image can be a significant mental health issue.
- People with negative body image may
 - engage in excessive body checking (weighing, measuring, and trying on clothing)
 - camouflage their size and shape with loose and bulky clothing
 - avoid social situations that trigger physical self-consciousness
 - avoid exposing their bodies (not wearing bathing suits or shorts)

How Do Eating and Body Image Go Together?

There is a relationship between eating behaviours and body image. In general, eating disorders are examples of internal conflicts about food and/or body size and shape. They are more complicated, however, than just having a big appetite and unhealthy eating patterns.

The range of feelings and behaviours associated with eating and body image can be represented along a continuum (Gannett Health Services).

- Healthy eating behaviours, at one end of the continuum, are associated with feeling confident about body shape and size.
- Disordered eating behaviours, at the other end of the scale, are associated with a preoccupation with appearance and an attempt to change body size through a focus on diets.

Eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder:

- **Anorexia nervosa** is characterized by fear of weight gain and severe restriction of food intake, which can result in significant weight loss.
- **Bulimia nervosa** involves an attempt to avoid weight gain or to manage weight through frequent compensation by purging.

- **Binge eating disorder** defines a pattern of binge eating (feeling out of control while eating) without purging.

Note, however, that “eating disorders often do not fall neatly into these categories and may take a variety of forms, from mild to severe. Treatment for eating disorders is important at any level of severity to reduce the risk of short-term and long-term health problems” (Gannett Health Services).

In the next learning activity students have an opportunity to examine the relationship between eating behaviours and body image.

REFERENCES



For definitions of positive and negative body image, and the factors that affect them, and for information on the relationship between eating behaviours and body image, refer to the following websites:

Body Sense: Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport. “Developing Positive Body Image.” *Athletes*. 2005. www.bodysense.ca/athletes/m_body_image_e.html>.

---. “What Is Body Dysmorphia?” *Athletes*. 2005. www.bodysense.ca/athletes/m_body_dysporphia_e.html>.

Brown University. “Nutrition: Body Image.” *Health Education*. www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/nutrition/body_image.htm>.

Butler Hospital. “What Is Body Dysmorphic Disorder?” *The Body Image Program*. www.butler.org/body.cfm?id=123>.

College of Education and Human Ecology, The Ohio State University. “Muscle Dysmorphia.” *Body Image and Health Task Force (BIHTF)*. http://hec.osu.edu/bitf/muscle_dysmorphia.htm>.

Gannett Health Services, Cornell University. “The Eating and Body Image Continuum.” *Nutrition and Eating Problems*. 2004. www.gannett.cornell.edu/top10Topics/nutrition-eating/continuum.html>.

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). *Eating Disorders Information*. 2002. www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=294>.

Sheena’s Place. “Body Image.” *Education and Outreach*. www.sheenasplace.org/index.php?page=body_image>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physlth/>.



For additional Canadian statistics on eating disorders, refer to the following reports:

Adolescent Medicine Committee, Canadian Paediatric Society. “Eating Disorders in Adolescents: Principles of Diagnosis and Treatment.” *Paediatrics and Child Health* 3.3 (1998): 189–92.

Jones, Jennifer M., et al. “Disordered Eating Attitudes and Behaviours in Teenaged Girls: A School-Based Study.” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 165.5 (2001): 547–52.

King, Alan J. C., William F. Boyce, and Matthew A. King, *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth: Health Behaviours of School-Age Children*. Ottawa, ON: Health Canada, 1999. Available on the Public Health Agency of Canada website at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/7-18yrs-ans/index_e.html>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

How Can Body Image Affect Personal Health?

Ask students to think about and respond to the following question: How can body image affect personal health? Write down their answers for class discussion.

Have students look at a continuum showing the range of behaviours and attitudes related to eating and body image. People who have a positive body image tend to demonstrate more healthy eating behaviours than those who have a negative body image. People may, however, find themselves at different points on the continuum from one time to another.

REFERENCES



Examples of the eating and body image continuum are available on several websites:

Barke, Sheri. "Eating Issues and Body Image Continuum." *Student Nutrition (and Body Image) Action Committee (SNAC)*. 2002.

<www.snac.ucla.edu/pages/Resources/Handouts/HOEatingIssues.pdf>.

Gannett Health Services, Cornell University. "The Eating Issues and Body Image Continuum." *Nutrition and Eating Problems*. 2004.

<www.gannett.cornell.edu/downloads/CHEP/Continuum.pdf>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at

<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Boosting a Body Image?

A variety of strategies can help individuals boost or improve their feelings about how their bodies look. Using the active learning strategy Rotating Reel (see Appendix E), have students respond to the following sample questions:

1. What are three ways to boost body image?
2. How can you change your body type?
3. If you know people who are always comparing themselves to others in terms of appearance, what could you do or say to help?
4. How could participating in physical activity contribute to positive body image?

NOTE TO TEACHER

If someone has a disordered eating problem, it is important to note that body image therapy and counselling may facilitate changes in eating and help people overcome disordered eating symptoms or recover from eating disorders.

REFERENCES



The following article on boosting body image may be helpful:

Brown University. "Nutrition: Body Image." *Health Education*.
<www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Health_Services/Health_Education/nutrition/bodyimage.htm>.

Refer to the following websites for more information:

Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. *The Dove Self-Esteem Fund*. 2007.
<www.campaignforrealbeauty.ca/dsef>.

This link goes to The Dove Self-Esteem Fund website, which provides free resources on media awareness, body image, and self-esteem. It also provides the Real Beauty School Program, specifically for teachers, and a series of films with accompanying classroom activity sheets.

Media Awareness Network. <www.media-awareness.ca>.

The Media Awareness Network is a Canadian non-profit organization. This website has a comprehensive collection of media education and Internet literacy resources. Media Awareness Network partners with the Canadian Teachers' Federation to present the annual National Media Literacy Week.

National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA). *Eating Disorders Information*. 2002.
<www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/p.asp?WebPage_ID=294>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Option A: Media Messages

This learning activity is intended to increase students' awareness of the impact the media have on the public and of how students can play a role in protecting themselves and others from media influences by creating a body-friendly culture in their school. Students can empower themselves by choosing not to buy into the messages the media try to sell to them.

Teachers may want to use some of the findings from a survey on the effects of exposure to the mass media and weight concerns to generate class discussion or a debate.

EXPOSURE TO MASS MEDIA AND WEIGHT CONCERNS

A study on the exposure to the mass media and weight concerns among girls between Grades 5 and 12 found the following (Field, et al. 5):

- Of the girls surveyed, 69% reported that magazine pictures influence their idea of the perfect body shape, and 47% reported wanting to lose weight because of magazine pictures.
- Girls who were frequent readers of fashion magazines were two to three times more likely than infrequent readers
 - to diet to lose weight because of a magazine article
 - to exercise to lose weight because of a magazine article
 - to feel that magazines influence what they believe is the ideal body shape

REFERENCE



For more information on the survey, refer to the following article:

Field, Alison E., et al. "Exposure to the Mass Media and Weight Concerns among Young Girls." *Pediatrics* 103.3 (March 1999): e36. Available on the American Academy of Pediatrics website at <<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/103/3/e36>>

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physlth/>.

Option B: Dove Self-Esteem Fund (Film Review)

This learning activity is intended to help students become critical thinkers about the media and about how much the media work to influence people of all ages. Students can view one to three short video clips (*Onslaught*, *Evolution*, and *Amy*) on the following website:

NOTE TO TEACHER

These films should be reviewed and chosen by the educator. Following each film viewing, educators can guide students through a series of questions for discussion. The educator sheets with questions specific to each film are available at:

Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. "Ideas to Take Action for Educators." *The Dove Self-Esteem Fund*.

<<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.ca/dsef07/t4.aspx?id=8408>>.

Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. "Dove Self-Esteem Film Gallery." *The Dove Self-Esteem Fund*. 2007. <www.campaignforrealbeauty.ca/dsef07/t5.aspx?id=7985>.

RM 4–MH: Wellness Inventory*

Instructions

Below is list of health and wellness indicators that describe how people feel and behave. The regular use of this inventory will increase your self-awareness. Additionally, it will provide a record for you to track such indicators in yourself.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Rate how much these indicators described you today.		Very	Fairly	Hardly	None
1.	How oriented or clear-headed did you feel today?				
2.	How rested did you feel when you woke up this morning?				
3.	How energetic, ready to go did you feel today?				
4.	How strong did you feel today?				
5.	How well were you able to meet challenges in your life today?				
6.	How happy did you feel today?				
7.	How well were you able to maintain your sense of humour today?				
8.	How prone were you to “lose it,” or experience rage attacks or explosive outbursts, today?				
9.	How interesting were you to be with today?				
10.	How stressful was your day?				
11.	How well were you able to manage stresses in your life today?				
12.	How well were you able to fulfill your responsibilities today?				
13.	How well did you get along with teachers today?				
14.	How much did you enjoy your family life today?				
15.	How well did you get along with your friend(s) today?				
16.	How confident did you feel today?				
17.	How good did you feel about your body today?				
18.	How well were you able to stay on task today?				
19.	Did you have bothersome health symptoms today?				
20.	Did you feel susceptible to illness today?				

*Source: Brain Injury Resource Center <<http://www.headinjury.com>>. Adapted with permission.

Continued

RM 4–MH: Wellness Inventory *(Continued)*

Assess your wellness further by responding to the following questions.		
21.	What was most stressful to you today?	
22.	What did you do about it?	
23.	Did your action make it better, make it worse, or make no difference?	
24.	What was the most restful to you today?	
25.	How much time did you take for yourself today?	
26.	How did it make your day better or worse?	
27.	What did you have to celebrate today?	
28.	For what did you have to be thankful today?	
29.	Did you have any trouble with your appetite today?	
30.	Did you start your day with a nutritious breakfast?	
31.	How many meals did you eat today?	
32.	Was that normal for you? (Refer to #31.)	
33.	Were the meals well balanced?	
34.	How often did you snack today?	
35.	Were they healthy snacks?	
36.	How much water did you drink today?	
37.	How many servings of caffeine drinks (e.g., coffee, tea, soda) did you have today?	
38.	Did you take any medication or drugs today?	

Continued

RM 4–MH: Wellness Inventory *(Continued)*

39. How many (total) minutes of each type of activity did you have today?

Type of Activity	Minutes
Light	
Moderate	
Vigorous	
Strength/Resistance Training	
Other:	

40. How did your physical activity change today compared with yesterday?

<input type="checkbox"/> Increased Activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Cut Down Activity	<input type="checkbox"/> No Change in Activity
<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed in Bed	<input type="checkbox"/> Stayed Home and Inside	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:

41. I went to sleep at _____ a.m./p.m. I woke up at _____ a.m./p.m. (Last time woke up)

RM 5–MH: Common Questions about Body Image

Common questions students raise in the classroom on the topic of body image include the following:

- How do I know what is a healthy weight for me?
- What diet really works?
- What causes eating disorders?
- How can I help my friend who might have an eating disorder?

The following information may be useful to educators if they are faced with similar questions in their classrooms. This information is based on a “do no harm” approach, which is considered best practice for eating disorder prevention.

How do I know what is a healthy weight for me?

There are different charts and formulas that are said to determine healthy weight. In reality, healthy weight is determined best by a person’s lifestyle rather than by a number on a scale or a chart. We all have a natural body shape and weight that is determined by our genetics and is different for everyone. We are meant to have different amounts of muscle, bone, and fat, which make up our body’s composition and influence our weight. The healthiest body weight is what the body sets for itself when a person’s lifestyle includes balanced, healthy food choices and regular physical activity.

Regardless of our weight or shape, every body needs nutritious food and daily physical movement to be strong and healthy. If this is a lifestyle that you practise, then rest assured your body is at the right weight for you.

What diet really works?

The issue of dieting is a confusing one because the media, in the attempt to sell ideas and products, bombard the public with dieting information. The first thing to know is that diets can be dangerous, particularly for young people, because the growth of bones, organs, and the brain are dependent on the nutrition put into the body. Diets that restrict food intake below what the body needs can actually affect internal growth and the efficiency of one’s metabolism (the rate at which the body burns energy). This doesn’t mean the body needs a lot of fast food or treats to be healthy. What it does mean is the best diet (or eating plan) for young bodies includes balance, variety, and moderation, and should not include skipping meals, restricting food, or omitting any food groups.

Continued

RM 5–MH: Common Questions about Body Image *(Continued)*

If you are concerned that your body weight is not healthy for you, talk to your doctor and your parents about how you feel. Many teens are perfectly healthy but are uncomfortable with the natural body changes that occur during puberty. Your doctor can refer you to a dietician if he or she thinks this is really necessary. If you want to change anything about your diet and explore the healthiest eating plan for you, take a look at your pattern of eating. Are you eating nutritious meals and snacks that include all the food groups? If not, you might want to address your lifestyle or eating behaviours. If your eating pattern includes skipping meals, getting overly hungry, and choosing foods in a hurry that are low in nutrients (high in saturated fat and/or sugar), you would want to make healthier choices about your diet, *not go on a diet*.

If you are convinced that you need to diet, ask yourself instead, “Am I physically active on a daily basis?” If not, you might consider how you can incorporate a regular schedule of exercise into your lifestyle.

What causes eating disorders?

There is no single reason why a young person develops an eating disorder, just as there is no one person who is protected from developing an eating disorder. We hear mostly of young women developing eating disorders, but in reality, girls, boys, men, and women of all ethnicities and backgrounds can have eating problems and body image issues. Researchers have shown that dieting behaviour puts an individual at greater risk for developing an eating disorder because, combined with other factors, it can set up a pattern where an individual is not listening to the body’s internal cues for hunger and satiety.

Usually a person’s relationship with food and his or her body gets out of control (restricting food, over-exercising, and/or binge eating) because he or she has underlying feelings (such as anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, loss, or fear) that need to be explored. Sometimes life stresses or traumatic events can also cause uncomfortable feelings that a young person does not know how to deal with. Regardless of the underlying reasons, disordered eating and eating disorders are serious problems that should not be ignored or minimized.

It is important that you tell a trusted adult (your parent or guardian, school counsellor, doctor) if you think you might have an eating problem. If the person you tell does not take you seriously, tell someone else. There are health professionals who specialize in disordered eating and body image issues. They can help individuals work through the underlying reasons for why this problem has developed so that the individuals are not at risk for long-term physical, mental, and emotional health consequences.

Continued

RM 5–MH: Common Questions about Body Image *(Continued)*

How can I help my friend who might have an eating disorder?

If you think your friend has eating problems or concerns about body image, talk to your friend.

- Show your friend that you are concerned and care about her or him.
- Let your friend know that sometimes people under-eat or overeat or try to control their body size because they are unhappy or stressed about something and you want to know more about how he or she is feeling.
- Remind your friend that because you care and ultimately want her or him to be healthy and happy, you want to be supportive but are worried about what your friend is doing to herself or himself.
- Encourage your friend to tell a trusted adult about the problems, or tell one yourself if you don't see your friend getting the necessary help. It might seem as though you are not being a good friend if you tell, but the truth is that getting help with body image concerns or eating problems when they first begin is the best way to help your friend avoid dangerous health problems in the future. Even if this temporarily puts a strain on your relationship, you are still doing the right thing.
- Be a good role model. This means not making negative comments about food or about your own body or others' bodies. Remind yourself and your friend that there is no such thing as being perfect or "having it all together." Compliment each other for the character traits that are unrelated to appearance.

