



# reCAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services  
University of California, Santa Cruz

## Building Better Body Image

CAPS meets with lots of students of all genders who are critical of their bodies and have a hard time accepting themselves as they are. Our culture can make it tough to feel good about how we look.

While some people believe they have to slim down or bulk up to have a positive body image, anyone can build better body image *now*—regardless of shape or size. Body image comes from the mind, not from the physique.

Having a more accepting attitude toward yourself is

a vital component of healthy body image. Some people mistakenly believe that if their body doesn't fit some "ideal," they need to criticize or punish themselves and/or that they need to change their body. Accepting yourself as you are doesn't mean you can't also work toward changes that make sense—it's not an either/or thing. But even when change could be useful, self-blame and punishment are not the most effective forms of motivation: Being kind to oneself and using positive motivation (e.g., building

on strengths) are better strategies.

One way to build self-acceptance is learning to notice when you're being harsh toward yourself. Pay attention to your thought patterns and how they affect your emotions and self-image. If your thoughts aren't helpful or realistic, practice changing your inner voice to be more compassionate and rational. Books and apps on self-compassion and mindfulness can help in this process, as can doing some therapy.

Good body image also means learning to focus on how using your body in healthy ways *feels*, rather than on how your body *looks*. Being active can help manage mood and stress and prevent or mitigate certain health issues, so exercise is important. But, being active only to lose weight or build muscles can damage body image and also lead to problems like over-exercise and injuries.

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## All About CAPS

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) offers confidential mental health and wellness services to registered UCSC students:

- Helpful workshops, trainings, and self-help tools
- A variety of therapy and support groups
- Let's Talk drop-in consultations
- Brief individual and couples counseling
- Referrals to on- and off-campus resources
- Limited psychiatry services
- Crisis services in person Mon–Fri 8 am–5 pm and by phone 24/7 at (831) 459-2628

To make an appointment, call (831) 459-2628 or stop by (Student Health Center, East Wing, 2nd floor) weekdays between 8 am and 5 pm. To learn more, visit our [website](#) and like us on [Facebook](#)! Also, check out our Peer Educator-created [blog](#) and [Instagram](#)!



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Find fun ways to be active, such as hiking, dance, martial arts, surfing, Ultimate Frisbee, shooting hoops, or walking to new places. Try to tap in to the enjoyment or social connection you can get from being active instead of fixating on measurements or numbers on a scale.

Exercise is most helpful for mood, stress relief, and physical well-being when done regularly and in moderation, not sporadically—but also not obsessively or in ways that aren't safe. Talk to a doctor if you have concerns about whether your exercise routine is healthy for you or if you are starting a new exercise regimen after being inactive.

Changing your relationship with food is another factor in body image. Eat a healthy, balanced diet and allow yourself treats in moderation. Avoid labeling foods as “good” or “bad.”

Not all foods are nutritionally equal, of course, but there's room for lots of foods in a healthy diet. Letting go of rigid attitudes toward food and diet is a component of healthy body image.

Avoid “fat chat”—talking about things you don't like about your body, calling yourself (or others) “fat,” or labeling yourself or others as “bad” for eating a particular food or amount of food. Notice urges to criticize or make fun of other people's bodies. If you catch yourself thinking or saying these things, try to stop. Fat chat makes your body image worse and can affect the body image and self-esteem of those around you.

Research has shown that exposure to fashion magazines and other unrealistically “perfect” images of bodies can damage self-esteem. Consider avoiding or minimizing exposure to media that feed insecurity and body image problems. When you do see images

of seemingly perfect people, remember that most images are altered and enhanced—even those “perfect” bodies are not perfect. Remind yourself that being a certain size or shape does not automatically bring happiness. Looking a particular way doesn't guarantee feeling good.

That said, taking care of yourself and your body, as well as your appearance, can have a positive impact on your self-image. Wear clothes that fit your current body size and make you feel good. Express your personality through how you present yourself. Get a cool haircut. Paint your nails. Wear a t-shirt with a picture of your favorite band or anime character. Learn to appreciate your body for how it looks and feels right now.

Changing the way you see yourself can take some time. Be patient, and consider asking for help from friends, mentors, or CAPS!



Left: Change your relationship with food. Right: Have fun while being active. Photos courtesy of UC Regents. All rights reserved.

## Dear CAPS,

*I was sexually assaulted and am not sure what to do now.*

—*Hurt and Confused*

Sexual assault should never happen to anyone. No one deserves to be assaulted. You should also know that there is help and support available on and off campus. As April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, this is a good time to talk about resources for survivors.

If you are in crisis following a recent assault, stop by CAPS or call ([831] 459-2628) during business hours and ask to be seen by our on-call crisis counselor. You can also call us on evenings, weekends, or holidays to talk to an After Hours Crisis Service counselor.

If the assault was in the past and you need help but are not currently in crisis, you can stop by or call CAPS during business hours to schedule an initial in-person appointment (usually within a week to 10 days). The counselor you meet with will get some information and talk to you about which services could be helpful, as well as provide support. Recommendations may include brief individual counseling with a CAPS clinician, group therapy, workshops, self-help tools, referral to open-ended individual counseling off campus, or other resources. CAPS can also help connect you with medical and legal services if needed.

Another valuable resource for UCSC students, staff, and faculty is the [CARE \(Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education\) Office](#), located at Kresge College near the Owl's Nest. CARE staff can provide advocacy, support,

information, and advice around sexual assault, including information about judicial/legal options and medical services. CARE also provides assistance around dating/domestic violence and stalking. To make an appointment,



From the City of Santa Cruz Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women. Artwork by Anna Oneglia.

call at (831) 502-2273, email ([care@ucsc.edu](mailto:care@ucsc.edu)), or schedule an online appointment via the CARE website.

Students, staff, and faculty seeking help with judicial matters involving a sexual assault perpetrated by another member of the UCSC community can contact the campus [Title IX Office](#). This office also handles campus issues related to sexual harassment and gender-based harassment and discrimination. Call (831) 459-2462 for help, or visit the Title IX website to make an online report. [UCSC Police](#) is another campus resource for students, staff, and faculty who have experienced an assault and wish to make a report.

Off campus, [Monarch Services](#) offers a wide variety of services and resources

to survivors of sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, and stalking, including a 24-hour bilingual (English and Spanish) crisis line: (888) 900-4232. An additional resource is the City of Santa Cruz Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women. Visit their [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) to learn more. Finally, survivors can contact local police to report an assault.

Several national organizations provide information, support, and advocacy. One is [RAINN](#) (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network), which has a 24-hour crisis hotline ([800] 656-HOPE). Another is the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center](#).

You should know that in California, mental health and sexual assault counselors (including CAPS counselors and CARE advocates) are **not** required to report sexual or physical assaults to the authorities, unless the survivor is under 18, over 65, or a dependent adult unable to care for themselves due to a disability. A counselor may need to make a report if a minor, elder, or dependent adult is *at risk* of being abused or assaulted. Medical clinicians treating survivors of sexual or physical assault for an injury caused by the assault **are** required to report this to the authorities.

Regardless of which resource(s) you seek, it's important to be kind to yourself as you process and heal. Pay attention to your basic needs (safety, sleep, eating, support) and find a balance between moving forward with your normal life activities and giving yourself permission to slow down and take more time for self-care when needed.

## Upcoming Events

See our [website calendar](#) and [Facebook page](#) for more upcoming events.

**A LIGHT TO REMEMBER:** Stop by the Porter “Squiggle” sculpture on Thursday, April 12th, any time between 6 and 8 pm for this annual event to remember and honor those lost to and affected by suicide and mental illness. Create a luminaria decorated with messages and artwork, to be lit with tea lights and placed on the Squiggle. It will be a beautiful light to remember.

**CAPS GROUPS:** CAPS offers a variety of therapy and support groups. We offer some weekly groups that require sign-up and a few drop-in groups, where you can come any or every week with no sign-up or appointment required. Check out our [Groups web page](#) or call us at (831) 459-2628 for more info.

**YOGA FOR MENTAL HEALTH:** A drop-in group that meets Thursdays from 4 to 5:30 pm April 5th to May 9th in the Student Health Center Mural Room (first floor, front). CAPS psychiatric nurse practitioner and yoga teacher Sharon Haight-Carter teaches ways to use yoga for mental health. Appropriate for all levels.

**LET'S TALK:** A drop-in space to get a brief, confidential chat with a professional CAPS counselor. It's free, and you don't need an appointment. Held four afternoons a week at different locations around campus when classes are in session (not during finals or summer). All

registered undergraduate and graduate UCSC students are welcome to any location of Let's Talk. Read more and see the current schedule on our [website](#).

**WELLNESS WORKSHOPS:** CAPS offers a different wellness workshop every Wednesday, 3 to 4 pm, when classes are in session (not during finals or summer), at the Student Health Center Mural Room (first floor, front). Workshops provide info and tools for being mentally healthier. Topics include sleep, moods, self-compassion, mindfulness, and focus. See our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for the schedule.

**ANXIETY TOOLBOX:** This three-part workshop series provides research-proven tools to help you better understand and cope with anxiety. Three hour-long workshops build on each other to provide info and experiential skills. Offered different days and times throughout the quarter. Read more on our [website](#), and call us to get more information and sign up at (831) 459-2628.

**MINDFUL LIVING:** This three-part workshop series uses mindfulness-based tools to increase self-awareness and build coping. The skills learned apply to a range of issues, including managing stress and difficult emotions. Three hour-long workshops build on each other to provide info and experiential skills. Offered different days and times throughout the quarter. A preliminary scheduled appointment at CAPS is required before sign-up if you have not been seen at CAPS this academic year. Read more on our [website](#). Call for more info at (831) 459-2628.

## Myths and Facts About Pot Legalization

Since marijuana became legal for recreational use in California in January, 2018, some misinformation has been floating around. Here are some facts you should know.

**MYTH:** Anyone in California can legally use pot recreationally.

**FACT:** Marijuana use by those under 21 is not allowed.

**MYTH:** I can use pot on campus.

**FACT:** Pot is not allowed on campus.

**MYTH:** I can use marijuana anywhere off campus.

**FACT:** Pot use is allowed in private but not public places off campus. You can't use pot or have an open container in a car, whether you are the driver or a passenger.



**MYTH:** Pot has no harmful effects and many beneficial ones.

**FACT:**

People react differently to pot—for some, it can be used with little

harm, and for others it can be dangerous (e.g., those with or at risk for psychosis, those with lung or heart disease) or cause issues with school, work, relationships, and motivation. Some of the purported health benefits of pot are exaggerated and/or require more and better research. Pot may help with anxiety in some and make it worse in others. While pot may allow someone to fall asleep faster, it can interfere with sleep quality.

Read more about the legalization of recreational marijuana [here](#).