



Size does matter to too many men

Hot or not? Even if a guy has a body like Arnold Schwarzenegger, he may think he is still too small.

As are women, some men are driven by idealized media images to be seriously dissatisfied with their appearance. A growing number are developing what has been called reverse anorexia, muscle dysmorphia or the Adonis Complex.

Question: What are the characteristics of muscle dysmorphia?

Answer: Men with this condition are overly preoccupied and dissatisfied with their body size. Even if they are big and muscular, they may perceive themselves as too small.

On the surface, this skewed self-perception seems like the opposite of anorexia in women (and some men) who constantly think they are heavier and fatter than they really are. However, the two conditions share many similar features.

Both groups tend to be preoccupied with body weight and size, and engage in excessive

exercise. Choosing correct foods becomes very important. Both eating disorders may result in extreme efforts to control body weight.

Men with muscle dysmorphia often abuse performance-enhancing substances such as anabolic steroid drugs and dietary supplements.

Q: Is there any easy way to tell the difference between someone with muscle dysmorphia and someone with a normal healthy concern for weight and a simple enthusiasm for weightlifting?

A: No. But if a "hotie" is dissatisfied and preoccupied with his body and is no longer an adolescent, then this may be muscle dysmorphia.

Typical characteristics of muscle dysmorphia include frequent mirror checks, seeking approval from friends and being somewhat uncomfortable about exposing their bodies in public. Frequent mood swings and anxiety are common. At the extreme, exercise and dietary practices interfere with social, recreational or

work-related activities, often leading to problems in personal relationships.

Q: How can muscle dysmorphia be prevented and treated?

A: No real guidelines exist to prevent the condition. But as with eating disorders in women, early identification and prompt professional treatment is likely to be more successful than waiting until the problem has grown serious.

Fitness professionals are likely to notice the problem first, but are not trained to treat it. If you suspect someone may have this problem, be sensitive and careful not to cause a defensive reaction. Some patience and persistence, along with gradually expressing concern, may help the individual seek the medical, psychological and/or nutrition professionals needed to treat this complex condition.

For more information, see a book by Harrison G. Pope, titled "The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession."

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