



# Research Findings

## Most Americans Experience Feeling Dissatisfied with How Their Body Looks from Time to Time, Including Nearly Two in Five Who Feel This Way Whenever They Look in the Mirror

### At Least One in Three Would Give Up Alcohol, Pizza, and/or Social Media if it Meant They Could Achieve Their Perfect Body Overnight

**Washington, DC, February 13, 2018** — Most Americans report feeling unhappy with how their body looks at times (79% vs. 21% never, I am always satisfied with how my body looks), with dissatisfaction most prevalent when looking in the mirror (37%), when at the beach in a bathing suit (32%), or when shopping for clothes (31%). According to the recent online survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of RiverMend Health, more than a quarter also report being dissatisfied with how they look when trying on old clothes they haven't worn in a while (27%), while comparing themselves to images of people they see on social media (14%), to other people at the gym/in workout classes (13%), or to TV/movie actors/actresses (11%) leads more than one in ten to feel dissatisfied with how they look. Similar proportions report feeling unhappy with their physical appearance when they are at parties or social events (12%) or in bed with their partner (10%), while slightly fewer mention family gatherings (8%) or get togethers with friends (7%) as triggers for feeling dissatisfied with how they look. For another 8% of those surveyed, it doesn't matter where they are - they always feel dissatisfied with how they look.

- Those most likely to report being dissatisfied with how their bodies look include women (83% vs. 74% of men), younger adults (86% of those ages 18-34 vs. 75% of those 55+), and those with a college degree (82% vs. 75% of those with no college degree).
- For women in particular, being at the beach in their bathing suit (38% vs. 26% of men), shopping for clothes (44% vs. 17%), and trying on old clothes they haven't worn in a while (35% vs. 19%) are especially likely to trigger negative thoughts about their body image compared to men who say the same.

Americans are most likely to describe their idea of the 'perfect' body as being athletic, whether the body in question is male (54%) or female (43%). Those under the age of 55 (58%) and those with a college degree (59%) are especially likely to describe the perfect male body as being athletic, while women (49%) stand out as being especially likely to say an athletic physique best describes their idea of the perfect/ideal female body.

The 'dad bod' (20%) ranks second (though at a distance) when thinking about male physiques more specifically, while more than one in ten describe their perfect idea of the male body as being very muscular (14%). In comparison, only 4% describe their idea of the perfect male body as being rock-star thin, while 7% mention some other build/figure.

- No major differences exist across gender when it comes to perceptions of the perfect male body. However, 'dad bods' are more likely to be preferred by older adults (30% of those ages 55+ vs. 12% of those 18-34), those with no children living at home (22% vs. 15% of those with kids), and the less educated (23% vs. 17% of those with a college degree), while those under the age of 35 are particularly likely to rate a very muscular build as being the ideal male body type (19% vs. 11% of adults ages 55+).

Address: 2020 K Street NW, Suite 410  
Washington, DC 20006  
Tel: +1 202 463-7300

Contact: **Chris Jackson**  
*Vice President., U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
Email: [chris.jackson@ipsos.com](mailto:chris.jackson@ipsos.com)  
Tel: +1 202 420-2025

**Marie-Pierre Lemay**  
*Senior Account Manager, U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
[marie.lemay@ipsos.com](mailto:marie.lemay@ipsos.com)  
+1 613 793-1622



## Research Findings – continued –

Going back to describing the ideal female body, an athletic physique (43%) is followed by a woman with curves, the latter rated as being the perfect body type by just over a third (34%). This time, one in ten select model thin as being the perfect female body (11%), while very few describe their idea of the perfect female body as being very muscular (3%). Other physiques/body types are brought up by one in ten (9%).

- Greater variations exist across gender when it comes to perceptions of the perfect female body. For instance, while women are particularly likely to describe the perfect female body as being athletic (49% vs. 35% of men), significantly greater proportions of men describe their idea of the perfect female body as being curvy (38% vs. 30% of women) or again model thin (16% vs. 6%).

Most Americans would be willing to take action in order to attain their perfect/ideal body – including a majority (55%) who say they would be willing to exercise several times per week and another 15% who would be willing to exercise to the edge of their physical limits every day, even if they had to endure pain. Whereas one in five would be willing to take performance-enhancing dietary supplements (21%, e.g., protein, creatine, vitamins and minerals, etc.), not nearly as many would be willing to take performance enhancing drugs (5%, e.g., human growth hormone (HGH), testosterone creams, anabolic steroids, etc.). Roughly one in ten would consider consuming weight-loss pills (14%), committing to a severely restricted diet (12%), skipping meals (11%), and/or undergoing liposuction/fat reduction (10%) to achieve their perfect body, while another 10% would be willing to do anything that wouldn't kill them. Americans are not as willing to undergo cosmetic surgery (7%), consume laxatives (4%), and/or purge/throw-up after eating (1%). On the other hand, roughly a third would not be willing to do any of these to attain their perfect/ideal body - either because they like their body the way it is (20%), or because they believe a perfect body will never be within their reach (14%).

- Though similar proportions of men and women would be prepared to do many of these things in order to achieve their perfect body, men tend to be significantly more likely to be willing to exercise to the edge of their physical limit every day, even if they have to endure pain (23% vs. 8% of women) and take performance-enhancing drugs (9% vs. 2%).
- Younger adults – especially those under the age of 35 – are also much more eager to take action in order to achieve their perfect body compared to those over the age of 55.

Americans are not as critical when thinking about their current/potential significant other's body, with two in five (41%) saying that they would not want their partner to take any action because they like them the way they are, and another 8% saying they would not want their partner to change anything as a perfect body will never be within their reach. However, sizeable proportions (41%) would want their significant other/romantic partner to start exercising several times per week, while just under one in ten would want them to exercise to the edge of their physical limits every day (8%) or take performance enhancing dietary supplements (8%). Nearly as many would want their partner to commit to a severely restricted diet (7%) or try anything that wouldn't kill them (7%), while other mentions fall below this threshold.

- Men are especially likely to say they would want their partner to exercise to the edge of their physical limits everyday regardless of pain (13% vs. 5% of women), skip meals (5% vs. 1%), take performance-enhancing drugs (5% vs. 2%), consume laxatives (3% vs. 0%), or throw up after eating (3% vs. 0%) so that they could achieve what they believe is the perfect body.
- Younger adults, those with children living at home, and those with a college degree also stand out as being more likely to want their partners to take many of these action in order to attain a perfect body.

Just over three quarters would further be willing to give up something they love if it meant they could achieve their perfect body overnight, including more than two in five who would say goodbye to deep fried foods (45%), candy/sweets (43%), and/or alcohol (41%). Americans are not as likely to be willing to give up pizza - though more than a third would do so (35%) - while nearly as many would give up social media altogether if it meant they could have their perfect body overnight (33%). Roughly one in ten would trade

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*Vice President., U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
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## Research Findings – continued –

in sex (10%) or their pet(s) (8%) for the chance to wake up in a perfect body, while one in twenty would give up a year of their life (5%) or their job/career (5%). Very few would be willing to give up their home (3%), a relationship with someone they love (2%), their financial security (2%), or their physical/emotional health (2%). On the other hand, 23% would not be willing to give anything up if it meant they could achieve their perfect body overnight.

- While women are more likely to be willing to give up deep fried foods (49% vs. 41% of men) and alcohol (45% vs. 37%), men are more willing to give up things like social media (38% vs. 29% of women), their pet(s) (12% vs. 4%), their job/career (7% vs. 4%), their home (6% vs. 0%), a relationship with someone they love (4% vs. 1%), financial security (4% vs. 1%), or their physical/emotional health (3% vs. 0%).
- Younger adults (ages 18-34) are also more likely to be willing to give up something they love for the chance to wake up in a perfect body, with greater proportions saying they would give up sweets (50% vs. 39% of adults ages 55+), social media (40% vs. 28%), a year of their life (10% vs. 3%), their home (7% vs. 0%), their financial security (5% vs. 1%), and their physical or emotional health (4% vs. 0%).

### Awareness/Knowledge of Eating Disorders

Most Americans agree that it is possible for men to develop an eating disorder such as anorexia, bulimia, or binge eating disorder (91%) – though nearly one in ten disagree with this statement (9%). Despite this, Americans are much more likely to say they personally know a female who currently has (or had) an eating disorder (45%) than they are to say they personally know a male who currently has (or had) an eating disorder (21%). Similarly, a greater proportion of adults suspect that a female they know might have an eating disorder (33%) versus one in five (21%) who suspect a male they know might be going through the same thing.

- Younger adults, especially those between the ages of 18-34, are significantly more likely to say they personally know someone (male or female) who has an eating disorder, or suspect someone they know may be suffering from this.
- Men mirror this pattern when it comes to other males, with greater proportions saying they personally know a male who has (or had) an eating disorder (24% vs. 17% of women) or suspect that a male they know might have an eating disorder (29% vs. 13%).

Nearly eight in ten believe that as many men as women want to change their weight (79%), though opinions are split when it comes to the prevalence of eating disorders across gender, with 52% in agreement that men engage in eating-disordered behaviors nearly as often as women, versus 48% who disagree. In fact, just over two in five further agree that eating disorders are very rare in men (43%).

- Young adults (18-34) and those with children living at home are among those most likely to both believe that as many men as women want to change their weight and that men engage in eating-disordered behavior nearly as often as women.
- Men are particularly likely to believe that eating disorders are very rare in men (50% vs. 36% of women).

Despite the differences that emerge when thinking about how men and women are affected by eating disorders, there is consensus when it comes to the belief that standard health insurance should cover treatment for eating disorders in both women (86%) and men (86%), with women and parents especially likely to support this type of insurance coverage across both genders.

Two in five Americans agree that eating disorders are a cry for attention or a person 'going through a phase' (39%) - and this jumps to 50% when looking at men who feel this way (vs. 29% of women who say the same). More than one in ten further believe that eating disorders are not serious; they are a lifestyle choice or about vanity (13%), while 16% think that achieving normal weight usually means

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*Vice President., U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
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## Research Findings – continued –

the eating disorder is cured. Men, adults under the age of 35, and those with children living at home are significantly more likely to think eating disorders are not serious and that the person affected is cured once back to a normal weight.

### Attitudes Towards Those Struggling with an Eating Disorder

If they believed that a male friend or family member was displaying signs of an eating disorder, Americans would be most likely to privately express their concern to that male friend or family member (55%) and/or encourage them to seek medical care and monitoring (55%). Just under half would encourage them to seek help via individual or group therapy (47%) and/or via nutritional counseling (45%), though Americans are not as likely to encourage their male friend/family member to take medications that might help (12%, e.g., antidepressants, antipsychotics, mood stabilizers, etc.). Expressing their concern to mutual friends/family instead of speaking to the person directly is something that a third of Americans would do in this situation (34%). One in ten would tell their male friend to just eat something (9%), while a similar proportion would do nothing (10%) – either because they feel it's none of their business (6%) or out of fear of being rejected/resented for the intrusion (4%).

- While a greater proportion of women say they would privately express their concern to their male friend/family member (62% vs. 48% of men) or again encourage them to seek help via medical care (61% vs. 49%) or therapy (53% vs. 41%), men are much more likely to deal with this situation by telling their male friend to just eat something (13% vs. 5% of women) or by not doing anything at all due to thinking it's none of their business (9% vs. 3%).

When asked to pretend that they are on a first date with someone (and things are going well), six in ten Americans say they would be willing to see this person again if they had an eating disorder (62%) – though nearly two in five would not be willing to go on a second date with someone struggling with an eating disorder (38%). Similar proportions would be willing to go on a second date with someone who had a terminal illness (62%) or was overweight/obese (62%) – though they are even more likely to go on another date with someone who is underweight/skinny (72%). Not quite half would give a second chance to a first date that had large amounts of debt (47%) while Americans are least likely to continue dating someone with a serious mental illness (29%).

Pretending again that they are on a first date with someone who has an eating disorder, one in twenty would end the date right there (4%), while another 16% would say nothing and see the date through, but afterwards never date this person again. Nearly two in five would want to talk about it to try and better understand him/her (36%), while similar proportions would not bring up the eating disorder on the first date, but be open to seeing this person again (40%). The remaining 5% say they would simply accept dating someone with an eating disorder, as they find it attractive.

- Adults are most likely to end a date on the spot if the person they were with was struggling with a serious mental illness (12%). However, ending a date right away because the person has a terminal illness (3%), large amounts of debt (5%), is overweight/obese (4%), or underweight/skinny (3%) falls in line with those who say the same of an eating disorder (4%).
- Americans are most willing to talk to their date to better understand him/her if the person is struggling with an eating disorder (36%) or terminal illness (37%). Adults aren't as likely to want to better understand people with a serious mental illness (31%), large amounts of debt (26%), or those who are overweight (24%) or underweight (23%).
- Not talking about these issues on the first date, but being willing to see this person again is most likely to occur when on a date with someone who is underweight/skinny (48%), while another two in five who would take this route if on a date with someone who is overweight (40%) or struggling with an eating disorder (40%). In comparison, only 19% would be willing to continue dating someone with a serious mental illness without talking about it on the first date.

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Washington, DC 20006  
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*Vice President., U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
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Tel: +1 202 420-2025

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## Research Findings – continued –

- Whereas adults are most likely to continue dating someone who is underweight/skinny (11%) or overweight obese (8%) as these factors are attractive to them, fewer say the same of someone with a terminal illness (6%), an eating disorder (5%), large amounts of debt (4%), or a serious mental illness (3%).

### About the Study

These are the findings from an Ipsos poll conducted January 3 - 5, 2018 on behalf of the RiverMend Health. For the survey, a sample of 1,004 adults ages 18 and over from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online, in English. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points for all respondents surveyed.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, region, race/ethnicity and income.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following ( $n=1,004$ ,  $DEFF=1.5$ , adjusted Confidence Interval=5.0).

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our [Public Opinion Polling and Communication](#) page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

#### For more information on this news release, please contact:

Chris Jackson  
Vice President, U.S.  
Ipsos Public Affairs  
+1 202 420-2025  
[chris.jackson@ipsos.com](mailto:chris.jackson@ipsos.com)

Marie-Pierre Lemay  
Senior Account Manager, U.S.  
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+1 613 793-1622  
[marie.lemay@ipsos.com](mailto:marie.lemay@ipsos.com)

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Contact: **Chris Jackson**  
*Vice President., U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
Email: [chris.jackson@ipsos.com](mailto:chris.jackson@ipsos.com)  
Tel: +1 202 420-2025

**Marie-Pierre Lemay**  
*Senior Account Manager, U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
[marie.lemay@ipsos.com](mailto:marie.lemay@ipsos.com)  
+1 613 793-1622



## Research Findings – continued –

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[www.ipsos.com](http://www.ipsos.com)

Address: 2020 K Street NW, Suite 410  
Washington, DC 20006  
Tel: +1 202 463-7300

Contact: **Chris Jackson**  
*Vice President., U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
Email: [chris.jackson@ipsos.com](mailto:chris.jackson@ipsos.com)  
Tel: +1 202 420-2025

**Marie-Pierre Lemay**  
*Senior Account Manager, U.S., Ipsos Public Affairs*  
[marie.lemay@ipsos.com](mailto:marie.lemay@ipsos.com)  
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