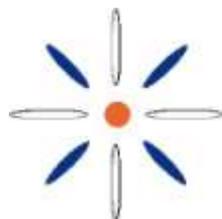


**Decalogue
of Best Practices
for the Promotion of
Self-Esteem and
Positive Body Image
in Social Media and Advertising**



Taula de diàleg per a la
prevenció dels trastorns
de la conducta alimentària

 Generalitat
de Catalunya

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Introduction

We present the “Decalogue of Best Practices for the Promotion of Self-Esteem and Positive Body Image”, an initiative intended to promote physical and mental health amongst the population and to prevent the onset and progression of eating disorders.

Promoting the positive body image and self-esteem of citizens is one of the main objectives of the Roundtable on the Prevention of Eating Disorders. To effectively promote positive body image and adequate levels of self-esteem, the Roundtable has encouraged the advertising sector to follow and support the Decalogue of Best Practices for the Promotion of Self-Esteem and Positive Body Image that we are presenting.

The Decalogue was founded by the *Fundació Imatge i Autoestima* (Foundation for Positive Image and Self-Esteem) under the advice of Francesc Escribano, a member of the foundation’s advisory board, and Carme Basté, a member of the board of directors of the *Academia de las Ciencias y las Artes de Televisión* (Academy of Television Arts and Sciences). The Decalogue was held in 2010 with the backing of the academy, chaired by Manuel Campo Vidal, and the *Fundació Imatge i Autoestima*, chaired by Mr Jaume Pagés Fita, and in 2012 it was supported by the *Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya* (Catalan College of Journalists). Based on the Roundtable’s work, the Decalogue of Best Practices for the Promotion of Self-Esteem and Positive Body Image have been revised, updated and improved.

The Roundtable on the Prevention of Eating Disorders has made it possible for a joint paper to be issued from the Conference on Anorexia and Advertising held in June 2014. This event produced intense and profound dialogue amongst participants from the health sector, the advertising industry and social agencies. Dialogue between members of these sectors did not end on the day of the conference. It has continued thanks to the efforts of many people and the determination of José Ángel Abancéns, a prominent figure in the advertising industry and president of the *Asociació Empresarial de Publicitat* (Business Association of Advertising).

We thus commend the commitment and work of many people and organisations who, despite their affiliation with a diverse range of sectors and interests, have helped us maintain an open and frank dialogue and identify 10 key practices that promote greater respect for body diversity and a more positive body image.

José Ángel Abancéns

Chairman of the *Fundació de la Comunicació* (Communication Foundation)

Bill Bernbach, a pioneer in research on the emotional and non-rational aspects of advertising, was asked what would be needed to launch a great campaign. His reply: “A great product.”

The *Fundació de la Comunicació* has made a significant contribution to this great campaign for the Decalogue of Best Practices for the Promotion of Self-Esteem and Positive Body Image in Social Media and Advertising, one based on a great product that is also a great service to society.

The work carried out by the Roundtable on the Prevention of Eating Disorders is a great service: helping prevent these diseases and promoting strategies to improve the lifestyle and quality of life of young people, families and high-risk groups.

The mission of the *Fundació de la Comunicació*, the Roundtable on the Prevention of Eating Disorders and the Decalogue of Best Practices is – through the participation of leading organisations in the sector – to achieve changes in habits and to control and reign in social and media pressure so as to prevent eating and weight-related disorders associated with low self-esteem.

These disorders include anorexia nervosa and its consequences, which lead people to aspire to unrealistic and unattainable ideals of beauty.

We appreciate this wonderful contribution to the Decalogue. Together our voices are great. We must control the volume and point it in a positive direction in a joint effort to support this admirable initiative. Success will be ours.

Decalogue of Best Practices for the Promotion of Self-Esteem and Positive Body Image in Social Media and Advertising

1. **Promote** a variety of realistic and healthy body images.
2. **Encourage** and respect the reality and richness of body diversity.
3. **Avoid the promotion of** high-risk behaviours and unhealthy diets.
4. **Disseminate** information on healthy lifestyles and eating habits and prevent the spread of false beliefs.
5. **Strengthen** the self-esteem of people irrespective of their physical appearance.
6. **Reject** unrealistic aesthetic ideals that jeopardise the health of individuals.
7. **Protect** children, during children's programming hours, from messages that run contrary to healthy lifestyles.
8. **Carefully monitor** the health of the teenage population, as they are the demographic group most predisposed to feel dissatisfied with their bodies.
9. **Combat** the high volume of messages targeted at women that cause body dissatisfaction.
10. **Ensure** that media portrayals of eating disorders reflect sensitivity and are well-founded.

1. Promote a variety of realistic and healthy body images

Media portrayals that equate body thinness with beauty, control and success can have a direct influence on the perception that people have of their own bodies. The use of such images as a means of seduction in advertising has led to them being identified with pleasure, well-being and happiness.

The promotion of this aesthetic ideal so prevalent in today's society has been identified as a factor leading to the onset of eating disorders (ED). Numerous studies have shown a direct relationship between the promotion of the aesthetic ideal of thinness and increased body dissatisfaction amongst the population, primarily amongst young women.

The use of images representing a diverse range of body types, particularly those which are more realistic, can contribute to physical and psychological health by offsetting the importance that people attach to their physical appearance and the desire to change it through diets or unhealthy behaviours.

2. Encourage and respect the reality and richness of body diversity

The beauty ideal of extreme thinness appears regularly in the media as being synonymous with health.

This association, which equates thinness with health, heightens anxiety amongst the general population and fuels the need to modify one's body.

Showing and promoting the body diversity that exists in society helps to combat stereotypes associated with physical appearance. The physical appearance of people who appear in the media, as well as that of advertising models who create associations between products and well-being and happiness, should represent all of the realities found in society (a variety of sizes, shapes and ages) and promote real diversity, as opposed to a single canon of beauty associated with a thin body.

3. Avoid the promotion of high-risk behaviours and unhealthy diets

“Restrictive diets and body dissatisfaction are gateways to eating disorders.” [5]

Attributing miraculous results to weight loss products, promoting the use of low-calorie products, abusing certain foods or classifying them as prohibited are *messages that assign a premium to weight loss*. These types of messages encourage people to adopt unhealthy weight control behaviours without understanding their potential health risks. Moreover, extreme habits such as skipping meals do not help one lose weight. National studies have shown that people who skip meals are more prone to be overweight, as missed meals are compensated for by other types of daily intake.

Dieting without medical supervision may bring negative consequences. It has been shown that highly restrictive dieting leads to a rebound effect. That is, the person ends up gaining instead of losing weight. Media organisations, when reporting on restrictive diets or “miracle” products or when advertising them, must also question and assess their performance, reliability and health consequences.

“4 out of every 5 Spaniards who want to slim down use ‘miracle’ products in spite of the risks they pose to health, and contrary to the notion of a balanced diet.” [4]

4. Disseminate information on healthy lifestyles and eating habits and prevent the spread of false beliefs

Recommendations carried over the media should convey the idea that the diet a person goes on to lose weight must meet their nutritional needs and be balanced. Similarly, compliance with current legislation on the advertising and marketing of weight loss products must be ensured.

Promoting healthy lifestyles in regards to diet should be a means for promoting health and preventing high-risk behaviours.

Some recommendations that may prove helpful:

- Encourage healthy physical activity
- Recommend and encourage having at least one meal per day in the company of others in a social setting
- All foods are healthy when eaten in the right amounts
- Recommend moderate consumption of high-fat foods, particularly products targeted at children, and avoid classifying them as “bad” or “forbidden”
- Do not attribute miraculous qualities to foods or beverages (water has no slimming properties)
- Appropriately characterise certain foods as having little nutritional value or as being recommended for occasional consumption (nutrition and dietary concepts)

5. Strengthen the self-esteem of people irrespective of their physical appearance

“About 75% of people at a high risk of eating disorders suffer from very low self-esteem. [1]

The self-esteem of a person is influenced by the image they have of their own body. The degree to which physical appearance affects self-esteem is influenced by the value society attaches to attaining a physical image normally associated with youth and thinness.

The aim is to avoid sending messages suggesting the falsehood that emotional and psychological well-being, as well as social acceptance, are primarily associated with one's physical appearance.

Messages linking thinness with social acceptance or other more direct messages — “Changing your appearance will make you feel better”; “Caring for your looks will make you more socially accepted”; “If you don't do this, you will feel bad” — are examples of widespread beliefs that can undermine a person's self-esteem.

The psychological and emotional well-being of people in regards to their physical appearance boils down to recognising that appearance is just one aspect of a person, not the only one.

6. Reject unrealistic aesthetic ideals that jeopardise the health of individuals

The ideal of thin-body beauty is currently equated with that of a healthy body, and also with being successful and having access to opportunities.

The way to promote a change in the values attached to physical appearance is to seek and promote the association between good health and the stereotypes linked with success and new opportunities.

Promoting the idea of health as a means to attain success is a realistic path towards reducing high-risk behaviours amongst adolescents. This new approach could be based on the association of behaviours that promote health with the attainment of personal success.

Certain popular stereotypes have been shown to favour the rejection of overweight people. Society tends to blame overweight people for their condition, an attitude based on the fallacy that the body is infinitely malleable.

It is scientifically proven that human bodies are very difficult to modify, and that a person's body shape is determined mostly by genetic characteristics. The premise that the body is "infinitely malleable" is based largely on efforts by the cosmetic and food industries to promote the idea that consumers have the body they wish to have, and that in order to change it they should consume their products. This is a false premise.

7. Protect children, during children's programming hours, from messages that run contrary to healthy lifestyles

Prevention efforts aimed at children should include messages that encourage dietary attitudes and habits that are healthy, balanced and that foster healthy lifestyles.

During children's programming hours, it is recommended to encourage good eating habits and avoid excessive exposure to low-fat (light) products or those with high caloric content.

Some studies suggest that children aged 7-8 already show concern about whether they are thin or fat and may engage in harmful dietary behaviour.

“Obesity rates in Spain, particularly those of children, are alarming. It is estimated that 20% - 30% of cases of obesity are a result of eating disorders not otherwise specified, and both obesity and overweight are risk factors for having a disorder.” [2]

8. Carefully monitor the health of the teenage population, as they are the demographic group most predisposed to feel dissatisfied with their bodies

“In Spain, around 60% of young people under 18 have gone on a diet to lose weight, and around 50% identify with a notably slimmer and sleeker aesthetic ideal than they currently have. This is an expression of disappointment with their looks and a partial or total rejection of their bodies.” [7]

The internalisation of beauty ideals has become more pronounced amongst today's teenagers. The physical and psychological changes that accompany adolescence explain the need felt by teenagers to have bodies that look like those of present-day models.

These factors point to the need to protect this age segment of the population from overexposure to thin bodies, and also from messages that encourage dieting or high-risk behaviours. Youth and teenagers are one of the fashion and leisure industry's most important consumer groups. Skipping meals, restricting food or practising intense physical exercise by teenagers who are overly-concerned about their physical appearance can lead to eating disorders. And the fact that 65% of Spanish teenagers feel dissatisfied with their bodies only intensifies the degree of risk.

9. Combat the high volume of messages targeted at women that cause body dissatisfaction

“9 out of 10 cases of food disorders are suffered by women.” [3]

“Feeling that you are overweight, as opposed to actually being overweight, is associated with psychological distress amongst women.” [1]

The constant bombardment of messages from the fashion, beauty and diet industries to which women are subjected promote the internalisation of a slim aesthetic model as the sole objective to which everyone must aspire. Almost all media messages about weight loss are intended for a female audience concerned about beauty and body image.

This constant and increasingly visual bombardment and spreading of the message of the infinitely malleable body leads many women to experience higher levels of body dissatisfaction when they observe or are exposed to images of thin bodies.

Several studies have shown that the image that women have of their bodies becomes significantly more negative after viewing media images of thin bodies. A relationship has also been shown between exposure to images of thin bodies and those viewing them experiencing feelings of shame, guilt, stress and insecurity – aspects related to the self-esteem levels of people.

This body dissatisfaction increases the likelihood of people adopting risk behaviours relating to diet and weight loss.

10. Ensure that media portrayals of eating disorders reflect sensitivity and are well-founded

“Providing information about the symptoms of disorders or describing behaviours associated with eating disorders may trigger the emergence of new cases.” [6]

Eating disorders are mental illnesses with serious physical, psychological and social repercussions for people who suffer from them and for those in their immediate environment.

Currently, the data suggest that 4% of the female population between 14 and 25 years of age suffer from an eating disorder. 11.5% are at high risk for these disorders.

When informing or speaking in a public forum about such disorders, it is very important for information to be based on real, scientific data. It is therefore necessary to consult with medical or psychological professionals specialised in eating disorders beforehand.

To correctly address this topic, it is essential to avoid associating eating disorders with being severely underweight. It should be borne in mind that we are talking about mental illnesses with high levels of mortality. While 70% of patients recover, the rest become chronically ill.

Not all eating disorders can be diagnosed based on a person's physical state. In most cases latent symptoms are not apparent, meaning that these disorders may go unnoticed.

While not all cases are very serious or result in serious physical impairment, eating disorders do cause high levels of psychological distress.

Care should be taken in regards to publicly aired portrayals of the illness, especially in cases of minors (and in such cases it is recommended that the person be advised and accompanied by their therapist).

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