



# Body shape

## Best practice guidelines

### Content warning

Exercise and dieting are referenced.

### Definitions

Originally created and defined by the fashion industry, the term '**body shape**' refers to the general silhouette and build of a person's figure. This silhouette is influenced by how narrow or wide a person's shoulders, hips and waist are in relation to each other. These same factors are used to group body shapes into different categories named after geometric shapes.

Though bone structure, fat, and muscle distribution may impact the silhouette that a person has, body shape is ultimately unconcerned with the weight of a person. Weight gain will not change your body shape, it only influences how weight is distributed.

Body shape is influenced by genetic factors, such as bone structure, family history of weight, and one's ability to gain and lose fat and muscle. Factors such as exercise and dieting may also affect a person's body shape over time, but the effectiveness of these activities varies from person to person due to the aforementioned genetic factors and environmental factors including sleep, stress, access to food, and other socioeconomic factors.

### Body shapes

Body shapes can be extremely varied, and cannot all be cleanly categorised. However, five of the most common body shapes are as follows:

- The '**triangle**' body shape is defined by the waist and hips being wider than the shoulders.
- The '**inverted triangle**' body shape is defined by the shoulders being wider than the waist and hips.



- The **'rectangle'** body shape is defined by the shoulders, waist and hips all being roughly equal to each other in width.
- The **'oval'** body shape is defined by the waist being wider than the shoulders and hips.
- The **'hourglass'** body shape is defined by the waist being more narrow than the shoulders and hips.

Some of these body shapes may also be compared and referred to as fruit. However, this is usually within very gendered contexts.

The usefulness of body shape categories is most evident in the industry they originated from: the fashion industry. In this industry, these terms mean that more clothes can be designed to flatter certain body shapes better, rather than just the idealised hourglass figure.

Conversely, keeping these body shapes categories in mind while making games, art, virtual mediums, and more, allows assets, and asset creation pipelines, to better reflect the diverse range of body shapes a game's audience may have. This is particularly so in regards to games that have character creation in some form.

## Fatphobia

The categorisation of body shapes is important because of the prevalence of **'fatphobia'**, the prejudice against fatness, fat people, and becoming fat.

The severity of fatphobia differs from country to country. Many cultures, such as ones in the Western world, have ingrained fatphobia very deep into the psyche of the people. However, there has been a recent shift away from fatphobic thinking due to the rise of social media often bypassing large media corporations who perpetuate fatphobic behavior, but there is still a long way to go before fatphobic thinking is eradicated. These cultural differences mean that a person's weight and body shape will be regarded differently depending on where they are and who they are with.

In societies particularly impacted by fatphobia, this stigma means that people are pressured to lose weight and maintain a body shape with a slim waist. It is fatphobia that leads some body shapes—the hourglass in the current day, sporty in the 70s, thin rectangular bodies in the 90s, and much more—to be more idealised than others.



Queerly Represent Me Ltd.  
Trading as *Represent Me*  
ABN: 95 626 874 226  
ACN: 626 874 226

---

## Body image

While body shape is the literal silhouette of a person, **body image** is how a person perceives their body shape, whether that be a positive or negative impression. Body image is subjective and greatly affected by external forces such as fatphobia, cultural and social norms, and representation or lack thereof in media.

**Distorted body image** occurs when there is a dissonance between a person's body shape, their perception of their body shape, and what they wish their body shape looks like. This is often also colloquially referred to as **body dysmorphia**. However it is important to note that **Body Dysmorphic Disorder** or 'BDD' is a recognised anxiety disorder.

## Resources

### Perceptions of Perfection Across Borders

<https://onlinedoctor.superdrug.com/perceptions-of-perfection/>

Cultural differences in idealised body shapes and weight for women in 18 countries. Content warning: This study uses binary language, uses Body Mass Index (BMI), and has potentially disturbing imagery of bodies.

---

v.1.0 | Updated June 2021

*Represent Me acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work.  
We pay our respects to Elders past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded.*