# The troubling rise of SkinnyTok and its impact on body image



A concerning trend, referred to as "SkinnyTok," is emerging on popular social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Reddit, and YouTube, amassing millions of views and promoting extreme weight loss methods, restrictive eating strategies, and toxic discipline as pathways to happiness or perceived ideals of thinness. This trend has drawn alarms from health professionals and individuals who have experienced eating disorders, indicating that it is leading vulnerable users into perilous situations.

Phaith Montoya, a body-positive influencer and eating disorder survivor, expressed her concerns, stating, “I know that if I had seen that [advice] when I was younger, I would have thought I needed it, too,” in a conversation with TODAY.com.

Experts warn that "SkinnyTok" has the potential to negatively impact young and impressionable social media users. While TikTok's interface appears to discourage the trend by displaying messages like "You are more than your weight" alongside links to eating disorder resources when users search for "SkinnyTok," many videos promoting hazardous "motivational" advice persist. These videos advocate for behaviours such as skipping meals or consuming coffee to suppress hunger and feature slogans that evoke a culture of self-harm. For instance, one slogan states, “If your stomach is growling, pretend it’s applauding you,” while another asserts, “To be small, eat small. To be big, eat big.”

Dr Asim Cheema, an internal medicine specialist, highlighted the alarming nature of this trend, stating that it glorifies starvation and reduces food to a mere utility, sparking major medical concerns. Stephen Buchwald of Manhattan Mental Health characterised this movement as a rebranding of early 2000s pro-anorexia communities, now tailored for a Gen Z audience. He remarked, “This mindset dismisses the complex realities of genetics, mental health and socioeconomic factors, promoting shame over support. It’s a toxic narrative disguised as empowerment.”

Despite TikTok’s stated policies against the promotion of disordered eating and dangerous weight loss behaviours, users may still encounter content that espouses “potentially harmful weight management” practices. Such content is restricted to users over 18 and may not appear on the For You page. However, the harmful narratives promote a culture where individuals feel inadequate in comparison to curated images of thinness.

Buchwald further elaborated on the psychological toll of this phenomenon, stating, “Seeing curated, unrealistic images of thinness on a daily basis can make people feel like they’re never ‘good enough.’ This creates a cycle of self-criticism and low self-worth, which can escalate into anxiety and depression.” He highlighted that adolescents are particularly susceptible due to their developmental desire for approval and belonging.

The persistence of the thin ideal remains evident, even in the face of increasing backlash against fatphobia and diet culture. Martha Laham, an author, noted, “SkinnyTok is just another version of something we’ve seen in the past. The types of media and how we pursue it may be new, but the thin ideal has always been there.”

Concerns about the potential for dangerous dietary advice also emerged. Andrea Mathis, a dietitian and blogger, cautioned, “Even if some of the creators have good intentions, they are sometimes giving nutrition advice, which they should not do.” She elaborated that what may start as innocent dietary habits can devolve into obsession, warning of the risks involved with crash dieting.

Nutrition expert Maria AbiHanna remarked on the ineffectiveness of crash dieting, stating, “People blame willpower when they can’t stick with a diet. The truth is your body is built to resist rapid fat loss,” indicating the fine line between weight loss and the onset of disordered eating behaviours.

While the conversation surrounding eating disorders and body image continues to evolve, the emergence of trends like "SkinnyTok" indicates that the pursuit of the thin ideal remains pertinent and continues to pose risks to mental and physical health.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.misbar.com/en/qna/2025/04/14/what-%E2%80%9Cskinnytok%E2%80%9D-trend-tiktok> - This article explains the 'SkinnyTok' trend, which promotes extreme thinness and restrictive eating habits. It highlights concerns from health professionals about the trend's negative impact on mental health.
* <https://munsifdaily.com/the-dark-side-of-skinny-tok-why-this-viral/> - The article delves into the harmful messaging of 'SkinnyTok', noting how it glorifies unhealthy habits under the guise of wellness. It also mentions that the trend leads to serious health issues like electrolyte imbalances and hormonal disruptions.
* <https://www.vice.com/en/article/the-skinnytok-social-media-trend-explained> - This article discusses 'SkinnyTok' creators using tough phrases to promote unhealthy beauty standards. It includes expert warnings about the trend's potential for leading to medical issues and psychological distress.
* <https://lakelandcc.edu/html/js/editor/ckeditor/editor/filemanager/browser/liferay/browser.html?vid=qq3RmylVi3Q&Connector=%2F%2Fblog.z00x.org%2Flakelandcc%2Fk%2Fc%2Fportal%2F> - Although not fully accessible, this reference is mentioned in context to discussing viral wellness trends like 'SkinnyTok', which can have significant impacts on diet culture.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides background information on the broader context of 'SkinnyTok', including concerns from experts and survivors of eating disorders about its impact on mental health.