# Inside SkinnyTok: the alarming TikTok trend reversing body positivity gains



# Inside the Alarming Trend of 'SkinnyTok': A Deep Dive into Online Harm

In an era where social media profoundly impacts self-image, a disconcerting trend has surfaced under the banner of 'SkinnyTok'. Echoing the controversial mantra of the 1990s, "nothing tastes as good as skinny feels", young women and girls are drawn to messages that glamorise extreme dieting and fitness routines. This trend is not merely a passing fad; it has amassed over half a million posts across TikTok, prompting urgent calls for scrutiny and action from regulators and mental health advocates alike.

The emergence of 'SkinnyTok' represents a worrying resurgence of restrictive diet culture among Generation Z, diverging sharply from the body positivity principles celebrated in the last decade. This stark shift is evidenced by a slew of viral affirmations that propagate harmful ideologies. Phrases such as "Don't reward yourself with food, you're not a dog" reflect a toxic mindset that many young users might inadvertently adopt. A growing focus on abhorrent eating habits and questionable fitness practices has alarmed mental health professionals, who are increasingly vocal about the ramifications of such content.

Sophia Healy, a former anorexia sufferer, poignantly articulated the detrimental influence of social media on young minds. In her view, platforms like TikTok romanticise the pursuit of thinness, creating an illusion that happiness is contingent upon achieving an unrealistic body ideal. "You get some girls talking about what they eat to stay skinny, like being skinny is the be-all and end-all," she expressed. Healy notes the dichotomy of online content that shifts perspectives on body shapes, illustrating how influencers initially celebrated for body positivity have recently adopted more slender appearances, perpetuating a harmful cycle that seems to be backtracking society's progress.

The oppressive nature of 'SkinnyTok' extends beyond mere aesthetics. An alarming body of research indicates that exposure to disordered eating content can have immediate negative effects on body image. A study from Australia revealed that even a brief viewing of such TikTok videos can lead to significant declines in self-satisfaction among young women. This is compounded by findings from a survey of TikTok users with eating disorders, where a staggering 80% reported that the platform adversely affected their recovery, leaving many feeling trapped within a cycle of unhealthy comparisons and competitive ideals.

On a systemic level, the response to 'SkinnyTok' has been varied. While TikTok claims to take mental health seriously and has implemented updates to its community guidelines banning content that promotes disordered eating behaviours, gaps in enforcement remain. Recent legal actions, such as a lawsuit from French families whose children were exposed to harmful content, underscore the platform's perceived negligence in protecting vulnerable users. These families argue that TikTok's algorithm prioritises engagement over the well-being of its younger audience, an assertion echoed by regulators across Europe.

Moreover, the European Commission is currently evaluating whether TikTok adequately safeguards minors, following a chorus of concern from digital ministers across multiple countries. Clara Chappaz, France's Minister for Digital Media, has flagged the trend as unacceptable, emphasising the heightened risk it poses to young people's mental health. This regulatory atmosphere has prompted wider discussions about the responsibilities of social media companies, particularly in light of the pervasive influence of algorithms that tailor content based on user interaction.

As the situation develops, other nations, including the UK, have yet to impose stringent measures specifically targeting 'SkinnyTok' content. However, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has initiated efforts to restrict the promotion of prescription-only weight-loss medications online. Ofcom, the communications regulator, has also advocated for safer online experiences for young people, proposing various strategies to mitigate the impact of legal but harmful content on digital platforms.

As the narrative surrounding eating disorders unfolds in digital spaces, many influencers and content creators are caught in a precarious position—a delicate balance between promoting health and inadvertently contributing to toxic behaviours. The voices of those like Anna Sorrentino, who assert that the competitiveness of eating disorders flourishes within social media environments, serve as sobering reminders of the work that lies ahead. “It creates an anonymous platform for people to post their 'accomplishments'," Sorrentino observed, highlighting both the allure and danger of these online communities.

Amidst the increasing visibility of 'SkinnyTok', the need for proactive measures to combat harmful content on social media platforms has never been more pressing. As the online landscape continues to morph, fostering a culture that celebrates body diversity and mental well-being remains imperative. Only through concerted efforts from regulators, platforms, and users alike can we hope to reverse the troubling trajectory of trends like 'SkinnyTok' and protect the mental health of the younger generation.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657723/Inside-latest-harmful-online-trend-dubbed-SkinnyTok-young-girls-women-consuming-dangerous-content-sweeping-internet.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657723/Inside-latest-harmful-online-trend-dubbed-SkinnyTok-young-girls-women-consuming-dangerous-content-sweeping-internet.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/07/ten-minutes-of-tiktok-content-promoting-anorexia-harmful/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/technology/french-families-sue-tiktok-over-alleged-failure-remove-harmful-content-2024-11-04/), [[3]](https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-regulators-looking-into-skinnytok-trend-tiktok/), [[6]](https://www.itv.com/news/2022-06-28/80-of-tiktok-users-surveyed-said-app-hindered-eating-disorder-recovery)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657723/Inside-latest-harmful-online-trend-dubbed-SkinnyTok-young-girls-women-consuming-dangerous-content-sweeping-internet.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2024-04-25/tiktok-weight-loss-guidelines)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657723/Inside-latest-harmful-online-trend-dubbed-SkinnyTok-young-girls-women-consuming-dangerous-content-sweeping-internet.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-regulators-looking-into-skinnytok-trend-tiktok/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.itv.com/news/2022-06-28/80-of-tiktok-users-surveyed-said-app-hindered-eating-disorder-recovery), [[4]](https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2024-04-25/tiktok-weight-loss-guidelines)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657723/Inside-latest-harmful-online-trend-dubbed-SkinnyTok-young-girls-women-consuming-dangerous-content-sweeping-internet.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-regulators-looking-into-skinnytok-trend-tiktok/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/07/ten-minutes-of-tiktok-content-promoting-anorexia-harmful/), [[6]](https://www.itv.com/news/2022-06-28/80-of-tiktok-users-surveyed-said-app-hindered-eating-disorder-recovery)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14657723/Inside-latest-harmful-online-trend-dubbed-SkinnyTok-young-girls-women-consuming-dangerous-content-sweeping-internet.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/french-families-sue-tiktok-over-alleged-failure-remove-harmful-content-2024-11-04/> - Seven French families have filed a lawsuit against TikTok, alleging that the platform exposed their adolescent children to harmful content, including videos promoting suicide, self-harm, and eating disorders, which led to the suicides of two teenagers. The families seek legal recognition of TikTok's liability for the content its algorithm promoted. This case marks the first grouped legal action of its kind in Europe. TikTok has stated it takes children's mental health seriously and has invested in protective measures but could not be reached for comment on this specific lawsuit.
3. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-regulators-looking-into-skinnytok-trend-tiktok/> - EU regulators are investigating the 'SkinnyTok' trend on TikTok, where users post videos promoting extreme thinness, to assess whether TikTok is adequately protecting minors online. The trend has garnered millions of views, prompting digital ministers in several European countries, including France, to express concern. France's Clara Chappaz called the trend 'unacceptable' and emphasized the importance of protecting minors online. The European Commission is cooperating with French authorities to investigate the public health risk posed by this trend.
4. <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2024-04-25/tiktok-weight-loss-guidelines> - TikTok has updated its community guidelines to crack down on content promoting disordered eating and dangerous weight-loss habits. The new rules explicitly prohibit videos that depict, describe, or promote disordered eating behaviors, such as extreme low-calorie diets, binging and purging, misuse of weight-loss medications or supplements, and exercising through serious injuries or illness. TikTok also restricts content that shows or promotes unhealthy body measurements and 'body checking' trends, as well as facilitating the trade or marketing of weight-loss or muscle-gain products.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/08/07/ten-minutes-of-tiktok-content-promoting-anorexia-harmful/> - Research suggests that watching TikTok videos promoting anorexia for less than 10 minutes can negatively impact body image. Australian researchers found that young women exposed to videos glamorizing disordered eating behaviors and extreme thinness experienced immediate declines in body image satisfaction. The study highlights the risks associated with TikTok's algorithm, which feeds users content based on previous interactions, potentially exposing vulnerable individuals to harmful material. Experts call for stricter controls and regulations to prevent the circulation of pro-anorexia content on the platform.
6. <https://www.itv.com/news/2022-06-28/80-of-tiktok-users-surveyed-said-app-hindered-eating-disorder-recovery> - A survey of over 1,000 TikTok users with experience of eating disorders revealed that 80% felt the app had a negative impact on their recovery, with 26% reporting a major negative impact. The survey also found that 93% believed TikTok does not do enough to protect users from harmful content. Users reported difficulties avoiding triggering content, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and expressed concerns about the platform's moderation efforts in addressing pro-anorexia material.
7. <https://www.tag24.com/internet/tiktok/tiktok-cracks-down-on-content-that-promotes-disordered-eating-3171879> - TikTok has updated its community guidelines to ban videos that show, describe, promote, or offer coaching for disordered eating or dangerous weight-loss behaviors. The platform defines these behaviors as extreme low-calorie diets, binging and intentional vomiting, misuse of weight-loss medications or supplements, and exercising through serious injuries or illness. TikTok also prohibits content that shows or promotes unhealthy body measurements and 'body checking' trends, as well as facilitating the trade or marketing of weight-loss or muscle-gain products.