



Build A Better Body Image

by Louisa Rogers

Talk to overweight women anywhere and you'll notice one thing regardless of how many pounds they want to lose, they have something in common. They all detest their bodies. And they are not unique. A number of studies reveal that most women whatever their size or weight dislike the way they look. But this outlook is especially damaging for those who want to slim down and shape up. The reason a negative body image can sabotage good intentions.

Research at the University of Cincinnati Eating Disorders Clinic, for example, found that people with a negative body image tend to experience feelings of hopelessness and to be lethargic, depressed and unassertive. Such feelings discourage weight loss, which requires willpower and self-confidence.

Moreover, there is growing evidence that through the influence of the subconscious your body alters itself to match your mental self-image. In other words, if you see yourself as fat, no matter how many pounds you lose, you are likely to gain them back to make your figure fit your mental image.

Happily the reverse is also true. If you learn to see yourself as slender and fit, you may shed extra weight naturally and without strenuous effort. To help you do just that here are eight steps toward building a better body image.

1. Act as if you were already slim. Most people with weight problems put their lives on hold until they reach their ideal weight. Rather than waiting act as if you have already lost the excess weight. Tuck your blouses in; attend the high-school reunion you might otherwise have avoided, go to the beach.

2. Exercise. This doesn't mean you have to tackle taxing workouts; non-strenuous movement is fine. Regular exercise not only offers well-documented health benefits but also serves as a reminder that your body works, that it will respond and that it can change.

3. Focus on the parts of your body you like. If you are overweight you've probably spent hours dwelling on the things you hate about your body. Instead look in the mirror once a day and find-and admire!-at least one aspect of your body that you like. For example, you might focus on your beautiful skin or well-shaped shoulders.

4. Talk positively. Disparaging statements about your body, even in jest, feed your negative body image. And it's virtually impossible to be overweight in a thin-obsessed culture without picking up the habit of making derogatory remarks about your body. When you hear yourself saying or thinking "My thighs are huge" for instance, stop and substitute a positive statement or thought, even if you don't quite believe it yet.

5. Visualize yourself as slim. Imagine, in detail, the body you want, the weight you want to be and the process of reaching these goals; think about your body's feeling slim and lithe. Do this at least once a day. When this image becomes part of your subconscious, weight loss may become easier.

6. Accept compliments. Even if your gut reaction is to deflect compliments, learn to say, "Thanks, that makes me feel good," or, "I'm glad you like it."

7. Dress to reveal your body. People with a poor body image sometimes hide under layers of clothing. If you're concealing your figure, unbutton your neckline a little, or wear shorter sleeves; when you exercise, put on shorts or a leotard instead of shapeless sweat suits. The message that your body deserves to be seen will slowly take root.

Try new activities. Experiment! Take up gardening, carpentry, sailing, kite flying or other hobbies that require you to be more physically active. By finding out what your body can do, no matter what your weight, you'll expand your sense of its capabilities.

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