

# Learning to *Love Our Bodies*



BY JACKIE DOBRINSKA

At the height of summer, the lucky among us get to spend time hiking to waterfalls, lounging beside lakes, and floating down rivers. We run around half naked in weather appropriate attire. Our desire to be comfortable inevitably bears more skin. For many, however, this greater awareness of our own bodies is not a source of delight, but rather one of shame.

Many of us have a negative opinion of our bodies, a distorted perception of our physical form. We can't celebrate or appreciate our body's strength and ability, because we're too focused on its "flaws." We think we're overweight, or we don't like our arms, our legs, or some other part of body. As a result, we feel ashamed, self-conscious, and awkward in our own skin. Just to complicate matters further, our obsessing about our perceived flaws is often accompanied by our belief that our inability to achieve the "ideal" body shape is a sign of personal failure.

Unfortunately, most of us can relate to these feelings. As a nation, approximately 91 percent of women say they are dissatisfied with their bodies, and for men that number is rising, from 15–43 percent over the past three decades.

Most experts blame it on the media.

On average, Americans see 3,000 advertisements every day, many of which feature images of uncommonly slim bodies that only four percent of American women actually have. Forty percent of these models, however, report that they suffer from eating disorders. The already impossible shape is further distorted through Photoshop, where waists are minimized, legs lengthened, and pores eliminated.

These images bombard us every day, and not just from television and magazines, but also on search engines, social media sites, smart phones, billboards, and schools.

While most people report they are not affected by

advertising, according to the editor of *Advertising Age*, 92 percent of ads are still received deep in our minds. In other words, a lot of the advertising we see and hear is specifically designed to weasel into the deeper layers of our psyche.

Focused on cultural memes of female thinness and male strength, too many of us waste precious time, money, and energy on achieving the impossibly idealized form. When we fail, as we are most assuredly going to do, it serves up a heaping spoonful of body shame.

We need to learn how to love our bodies again, to appreciate how they move, where they take us, and what they experience—regardless of shapes. In the September issue of *The Laurel*, we will address simple tools to rebuild a positive body image.

Until then, I suggest a fast—a media fast. Turn off the TV (or at the very least mute the commercials), flip by the magazine ads that feature unrealistic and unhealthy body types, and ignore the billboards that want you to become something you're not. Every day, list five to ten things you appreciate about yourself.

These are a few of the tools that helped me recover from a 17-year eating disorder and even longer dysfunctional relationship to my body. Ten years into recovery, I still keep up my *media* fast, and practice simple body-love techniques on a regular basis. When I share my story, I often hear from others who still suffer—women as old as 70 and girls as young as seven—who engage in disordered eating and body shaming tactics. It is time to get radical and learn to embrace our bodies, regardless of shape.

This body is your altar in life. May you receive its blessings with great appreciation.

*This article contains general information about medical conditions and complementary treatment, and is not to be considered expert advice. Always consult your physician and other qualified healthcare provider before beginning any new treatment, diet, or fitness regimen. Jackie Dobrinska is a wellness coach and owner of Herbal Yogini (herbalyogini.com). You can reach her at jldobrinska@gmail.com, or by phone at 828.337.2737.*