

Overcoming Negative Body Talk

BY JACKIE DOBRINSKA

The body is an amazing gift, a vehicle that perceives the beauty of the world, from the taste of ripe tomatoes to the sensation of a cool mountain stream. Yet, too often we seem to be at war with it.

Our media culture of thinness (for women) and strength (for men) tells us to whip our bodies into shape—lose ten pounds, gain six-pack abs, narrow our waists, and fill out our chests. If we fail to meet these “goals,” we begin to despise our own bodies, using our weight and size as evidence that we are failures.

This mindset drives us to persist on focusing our time, money, and emotions on the next big fad diet and new exercise regimen. Even if we achieve partial success, we are so indoctrinated by this culture of body shame that, instead of celebrating our successes, we focus on the next thing “guaranteed” to improve our bodies—and the next and the next. Too many of us eventually end up on the borderline (or beyond) of disordered eating and exercise habits.

I should know. I was there for almost 20 years. Willpower, psychologists, spiritual teachers, support groups, and tears didn't help. One day, I recognized

I might live like this for the rest of my life if I didn't do something to change. So, armed with the mantra “I love myself anyway”—in combination with the tools below and the media fast described in last month's issue—I was in full recovery three months later for the first time in my life.

Make Your Mind Your Best Friend

This means catching self-criticism. Whenever you think “I'm too fat/old/skinny/busty/leggy/wrinkly/saggy/etc.,” simply pause and remind yourself, “I can't believe anything I think. My internal mirror is flawed by my culture.” Reframe your attitude by making gratitude lists, noting anything you appreciate in the moment. Examples include the sunset, your breath, the sound of birds, your pet—anything that makes you feel good.

Focus on Your Attributes

List ten things you like about yourself. Focus on values, character traits, and passions, as this trains us to identify with more than just our looks. Reread your list daily.

Minimize Comparisons

One of the fastest ways to feel bad is to compare yourself to someone else. Ask yourself, “What is the benefit of focusing on another's perceived perfection?” Then list three reasons why it is ridiculous to think the other person is happier or “better” than you. Repeat as needed.

Nourish Yourself

Loving our body means eating real food, engaging in joyful movement, and replenishing ourselves through relaxing activities. Avoid strict diet or exercise regimens based on self-denial, shame, or pain.

Focus Your Energy

Instead of fixating on your perceived flaws, put energy into something you love or want to cultivate. Take five minutes to write a poem, move paint on a canvas, lend a helping hand, or send a note of gratitude to a friend.

Become Critical

Not of yourself, but of social

and media messages. The media sells products. Don't internalize their body-shaming tactics. Instead, choose to reject their messages before you reject your body.

To find long-lasting and deeply rooted emotional and physical health, cultivate an attitude of self-love. Radically focus on your strength, capacity, and ability to perceive beauty and pleasure. Love your body, and see how it responds.

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.

