

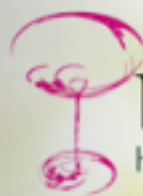
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THE BODY ISSUE



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BODY IMAGE CAN SHAPE WELL-BEING

BY CHRISTINE SCHMIDT

THE WAY WE FEEL ABOUT OUR BODIES DETERMINES WHETHER OR NOT WE POSSESS AN OPTIMISTIC BODY IMAGE AND A HEALTHY EMOTIONAL ATTITUDE. IN FACT, A WOMAN'S OVERALL HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING ACTUALLY HINGE ON THESE TWO KEY ELEMENTS. WHETHER WE'RE SATISFIED WITH WHAT WE SEE OR NOT REFLECTS ON WHETHER WE HAVE A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE IMAGE OF OURSELVES AS A WHOLE. UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S OFTENTIMES DIFFICULT TO WADE THROUGH THE CONFLICTING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IDEAS OF BEAUTY WE'RE REGULARLY BOMBARDED WITH IN ORDER TO FIND A HAPPY MEDIUM.

The diet and cosmetic industries, as well as the media, play heavily on our emotions with their empty ideology that thin is in and we all need younger looking skin. Sometimes people close to us may also influence our feelings toward our bodies with comments we interpret either positively or negatively. One of my close friends was teased by family when she was younger for being too skinny. Echoes of this criticism are still heard today.

And when I was a teenager in high school undergoing a routine scoliosis checkup, the male intern told me I was too “flabby” for my age. Humiliated and twice as self-conscious (the back brace was embarrassing enough), not long afterwards I found myself stuck in a vicious cycle of bingeing and purging, fad diets and excessive exercise. It took counseling and several years to eliminate the physically destructive behavior. Over two decades later, I still occasionally struggle with body image on a psychological level. When I look in the mirror I sometimes see a woman with lopsided hips, knobby knees and excess skin...but I'm getting better.

A couple of months ago at the gym, I noticed a woman about a decade younger than me training on a nearby piece of equipment. Admittedly, this woman was heavier than my sense of an ideal body image, but as I watched her complete her final set of repetitions, I couldn't get over the amazing physical strength and control she exhibited.

Fast forward a month or so. I met a woman a dozen or more years my senior who opened her mouth and out poured heartache over her own negative body image. At that moment, I realized I could be looking at my future.

These two independent moments, when processed together, helped me redefine my personal ideal. Today I am no longer striving to achieve the unrealistic and elusive “perfect” body. Instead, I am continuing to work toward my goals of being healthy and fit. And I'm beginning to like what I see in the mirror — more defined arms, sculpted legs, toned abs and a tighter caboose.

Everyone wants to look and feel their best, and there's nothing wrong with that. Some people may feel more self-assured with a little nip here or a tuck there. That's okay, too. The bottom line is we all come in different shapes and sizes, and at the end of the day we only have one body — one life — that we need to embrace, flaws and all. Not because we are defined by them, but because they make us the distinctive individuals we are. Only when we accept that truth do I believe we can truly feel confident in our own skin. ■



HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES = POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

- Select better foods
- Catch enough ZZZs each night
- Make time for regular exercise
- Engage in positive self-talk
- Do what you love
- Seek out positive people
- Treat yourself to a new outfit
- Spend time helping others