



7 Simple Strategies for Improving Your Body Image

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1. **Create a body-inclusive feed.** It's hard to take a step back from negative body image thoughts when you're surrounded by images of "perfect" bodies all day. Notice what feelings get evoked when you look at certain accounts and if they provoke negative feelings about yourself in any way then unfollow them. In addition, diversify your account. Follow accounts, blogs, profiles etc. that celebrate ALL bodies, including bodies of different shapes, sizes, abilities, ethnicities and genders. Research (eg. Cohen et al, 2019*) shows that even mindless scrolling through images of body-positive images results in improvements in mood and body image. This also applies to your social circle. If you have friends that are very negative about their bodies, consider spending less time with them, or create a boundary around body chat. It's a bit like someone who is trying to stay sober spending a lot of time with people who drink heavily. Set yourself up to win by considering your environment and the influences it has on you.

2. **Practice body gratitude.** It's really easy to get into a negative thought cycle when you're very entrenched in diet culture. After all, companies invested in weight loss rely on you feeling dissatisfied with your body, and it may be that those close to you also have a pattern of self-deprecation. Intentionally expressing gratitude towards your body can help you to cultivate a more positive image by shifting your attention to what is RIGHT about your body, right here and now. Bring to mind all the things that you appreciate about your body; the way your heart pumps oxygen round, the tone of your voice, the curl in your hair, the way your fingers can write messages to loved ones across the other side of the world; set an intention to express gratitude towards your body every day. You might also like to add this to a daily journal, or find a rock that you like and use it as your gratitude rock; a reminder in your pocket or on your desk to remind you of the things you appreciate about your body.

3. **Buy clothes that fit right now.** Have you ever told yourself you'll wait until you've lost weight before you'll wear clothes you really like? How long ago did you start doing that? Maybe you're holding out to fit back into clothes you used to be able to wear? The trouble with waiting is that we deny ourselves the opportunity to feel good RIGHT NOW. And whilst we're waiting to lose weight to give ourselves permission to feel good, we often don't bother to do the other things that boost our confidence, like taking care of our skin, or putting on make up we like, or putting effort into doing our hair. There is of course absolutely no obligation to do any of these things, but it can have a really positive impact on your body image if you do the things that make you feel good about yourself right now, regardless of your body size.

4. **Reject diet culture.** Give yourself permission to say no to the noise of diet culture and make the decision to retune to your body's inner wisdom about what it needs. This means putting yourself first, allowing yourself to experience pleasure in all foods freely, and rediscovering your trust in your body. Acknowledge that this healing process will take time and that you may need some support along the way, possibly from a Health at Every Size aligned psychotherapist or registered dietician, and that surrounding yourself with body-neutral and body-positive allies will help to shield you from pervasive and harmful weight loss messages.

5. **Do movement just because it feels good.** Choose movement activities based on how much you enjoy them and how good they make you feel rather than on the basis of how they might change your body. So often we become conditioned to exercise in order to meet step counts, hit calorie burn targets, stay in fat burning zones, or as penance for eating, rather than simply because it's fun and feels good for our bodies.

What movement would you enjoy most if your only goal was to enjoy it as much as possible?

6. **Defuse from negative thoughts.** If you struggle with internalised weight stigma, fatphobic and/or self-critical thoughts, learning to unhook yourself and take a step back from them so that you can see them for what they are (just thoughts) rather than facts can be really helpful in enabling you to move towards a more positive relationship with yourself, including your body. Creating this space also gives you the opportunity to connect with the things that feel most important to you, and act like the person you really want to be, rather than being pulled around by unhelpful cognitions.
7. **Replace body checking with self-care.** Try to notice when you feel compelled to check your body, whether it be weighing yourself, squeezing or pinching parts of your body, comparing your body to others, measuring body parts or taking 'progress' pictures. Whilst these behaviours are usually a response to anxieties about our bodies and a means of trying to find reassurance, conversely all of these behaviours tend to exacerbate poor body image by placing undue focus on physical appearance to the exclusion of all other valuable attributes. Following the previous steps will help you accept your body at the size you are right now, by helping you move towards a more body-neutral perspective, and therefore feel less need to check whether your body measures up to an oppressive societal ideal.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this document is intended for informational and educational purposes only and is not a replacement for individual mental health or medical advice.

* Cohen, R, Fardouly, J, & Newton-John, T (2019). #BoPo on Instagram: An experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young women's mood and body image. Sage Journals. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819826530>