

Ten Tips for Stopping Body Hatred

By

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Imagine a statistic, "Seventy-five percent of all American women feel "short." That would sound ludicrous. We all know that people come in all different heights--some of us are short, some of us tall, and most of us are in the average range. We might wonder, "what made these women decide that they were too short?" "What were they thinking?"

Now, consider this: Statistics actually do show that *seventy-five* percent of all American women feel "fat." We should be questioning why this is so. Just as we all come in different body heights, we all come in different body *shapes* and *sizes*. No child is born hating her body. No baby looks down at her body and cries, "Look at those thighs! They are so fat!" We have all *learned* to hate our bodies. But, we can *unlearn* this body hatred. We can learn to love our bodies again. Following are ten tips to help you regain your healthy body love.

- 1. Stop dieting.** Dieting perpetuates the notion that there is something wrong with you that can be fixed by depriving yourself of food. If dieting down to your "ideal" weight worked, then we would only have to diet once to achieve our goal. How many of us have dieted only *once*? Instead, we keep dieting and gaining back the weight in a cycle that demoralizes us.
- 2. Start listening to your body.** Most of us don't trust our body signals. We think our bodies are just itching to make us fat. Yet, your body is endowed with a wonderful inner wisdom that can tell you when, what and how much food it needs. You just have to learn to read those signals. (I teach you how to listen to those body signals in my book, *Weight Loss From the Inside Out: Help for the Compulsive Eater*)
- 3. Throw out the scales.** Many of us have become slaves to the scale. We tend to judge ourselves by a number, deciding what kind of day we will have based on that number. Provided that there is no medical reason for you to weigh yourself regularly, you will do best if you stop weighing yourself altogether, and let your body find its own natural weight.
- 4. Find something positive to say about your body.** No matter how much we hate our bodies, we can always find *something* positive to say about ourselves. It may take a while, and you may have to think a bit, but I'm sure you can come up with something you like--your eyelashes, your earlobes, your fingernails. You may even focus on how well a body part functions: "I admire how my legs can carry my body through the day." "My arms are strong."
- 5. Notice how often you have negative thoughts and feelings about your body.** You will probably be surprised (and horrified) to discover how many times a day (or an hour) you have negative thoughts about your body. No wonder so many women feel depressed. Anyone would get depressed hearing a barrage of negative statements hundreds of times a day. These negative thoughts and feelings not only depress us, but they make us feel judged and

unacceptable. Think about this: Would you ever say the horrible things you say to yourself to another person?

6. **Every time you notice a negative thought or feeling about your body, ask yourself what is really bothering you.** Many women translate negative feelings and thoughts into "I feel fat" thoughts. For instance, you might feel overwhelmed and out of control of your life on a particularly trying day, but instead of feeling overwhelmed, you might translate that thought into a negative body statement: "I am so out of control of my food. I feel so fat today." Next time you notice a negative self-statement about your body, ask yourself, "Is something else bothering me?"
7. **Replace negative thoughts with positive ones.** Every time you become aware of negative self-thoughts and feelings about your body, remind yourself of something positive. For example, if you notice yourself hating your stomach, you might add, "but I like the way my hair looks today." Counteracting the negative statements with positive ones helps balance your self-image, so that you are not just focusing on what you consider wrong with yourself.
8. **Practice looking at yourself in the mirror daily.** Most of the women with whom I work hate this one at first. I ask them to look at themselves naked in a full-length mirror--to look without judgment--just look. It is important to accept your body as it is, in its entirety. Bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Learn about yours.
9. **Look through women's magazines.** Look through the magazines, not with a focus on the content of the articles, but rather with the intent to learn what these articles and ads teach you about your body. You may be surprised to discover how negative the statements are. No wonder women learn to hate their bodies. We are told that we are too fat or flabby; that our skin is too pale or blotchy; that we have too much body hair, or not enough; that certain body parts should be made to look bigger or smaller; and on and on. Nothing about our bodies is okay. Of course, the aim of such negative statements is to encourage us to buy products to correct these "flaws." Try this exercise and your eyes will be opened!
10. **Have patience.** Change in body image does not happen overnight. It took years of negative messages from the culture, the media, your peers, and perhaps your family to create your body hatred. It will take a while to unlearn these negative messages. In the meantime, read all you can about the nondiet approach and about changing body image. Talk to other women. Join a support group. In time, you will notice changes in your view of your body. In time, you will learn to love your body again.