

Body neutrality

Why do we care about our bodies so much?



Cavemen science!

Our hunter gatherer ancestors needed to compare to others for survival. For example, an early human might look at another and think “wow, they are really strong and I’m weak.... What are they doing differently and how can I do that too?”. This might lead to crafting better hunting tools or foraging in a different area.

Comparing also helped early humans know where they fit in. It was important to be in a tribe for survival – protecting each other from threats, sourcing food together, and finding suitable mates. So, this makes sense! Comparison was essential for survival.



What about now?

Fortunately, we now don’t need this old brain wiring. Comparison now is a trap, as it no longer helps survival. Rather, as they say, to compare is to despair.

The good news

We can change our brains! We can teach them to not spend so much time worrying about our bodies.



A possible solution? Body Neutrality

Body neutrality recognises:

- 1) Our feelings about our body change constantly depending on what is happening around us. So, our feelings are best mindfully observed without judgement.
- 2) A central focus on what our body allows us to do, and appreciating this will lead us to respect and care for our body.
- 3) Acknowledging that our self-worth encompasses both internal and external passions and isn’t focused on our appearance.

Body neutrality means....

- It’s okay if you don’t love your body and it’s okay if you do, these feelings come and go.
- Mindfully noticing all thoughts about our bodies, whether good, bad, or neutral, and allow them to exist without judgement.
- Our bodies change over time and all bodies have different features, abilities, and conditions and that is okay.

We understand there are many pressures you face to look a certain way. Unfortunately, society and mediums such as social media (TikTok, Facebook, Instagram) may treat people differently if they don’t conform to a narrowly defined accepted body.



We know body neutrality can’t undo this harm, but ... we hope body neutrality offers a way to show compassion to your body and other’s bodies despite this.

Body neutrality has also been presented as a more realistic alternative to loving your body and appearance, which might feel unachievable or leave us with a sense of failure if we are unable to achieve this goal.

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Body Neutrality in Action

- 1) Notice the thought, feeling, or sensation and acknowledge you are thinking this. For example, “I notice I am having the thought that I hate my thighs”.
- 2) Acknowledge the thought without judgement. It’s okay to have these thoughts/feelings/sensations, living in a world fixated on image of course you do!
- 3) You might like to replace the thought with a more body neutral one. For example, “my thighs allow me move and do things I enjoy”.
- 4) You might like to list the things you appreciate about your body. For example, “my hands and arms allow me to hug my family” or “my lungs allow me to breathe in fresh air and replenish my body”
- 5) Think about “What can you do to take care of your body so it can continue to achieve all those things you appreciate about it?” This might be nourishing your body with food from all food groups, moving your body in a way you enjoy, or allowing your body time to rest.
- 6) Consider yourself as a whole person. The number on the scale or the image in the mirror isn’t everything. Reflect on who you are as a complete human being and what your values are, your strengths, and the things that are most important to you (this might be friends, work, pets, hobbies etc.).



Practical strategies to practice body neutrality:

- Wear clothing that is comfortable and enjoyable.
- Give away any clothing that no longer fits or makes you feel good.



- Practice self-compassion – consider what you might say to a friend and use this as a starting point to speak kinder to yourself.

- Self-care activities – what ever you like that shows love and respect to your self and body (for example, having a bath, listening to music).
- Challenging any unhelpful body thoughts.
- Redirecting body conversations with others.
- Use of body neutral statements.
- Write a letter of gratitude to your body.
- Clean up your social media! Unfollow content that makes you feel bad about your body. You might follow body neutral content instead.
- Work on decreasing the time you spend in front of the mirror. Covering it up might help.
- Work on decreasing the number of times you weigh yourself or get rid of the scales completely.
- Engage in body activism (for example, write a letter to call out a body shaming advertisement).
- Find a community of like-minded individuals.
- Practice opposite action. Do the opposite of whatever your unhelpful thought is telling you!
- Acknowledge your strength, values, qualities.

