

# Living Fit: Body Imag—ine!

According to the Wellesley College Women's Health Center, "A woman's body image encompasses her physical appearance, size, and shape." Marcia Hutchinson, author of the book "Transforming Body Image," states, "Our body image is formed out of every experience we have ever had — parents, role models, and peers who give us an idea of what it is like to love and value a body. Image is formed from the positive and the negative feedback from people whose opinions matter to us. It is also the way we ourselves have perceived our body to fit or not fit the cultural image."

SO...body image is officially the way YOU view your body.

One day, not long ago, I was walking through a big department store in a shopping mall. Suddenly, I spied a woman across the room and thought to myself, **MAN**, if I could only look like THAT! Seconds later I realized I was looking in a mirror...image—ine that? What a wake up call to the sick way my mind was making me feel about my body. All along I was living my ideal. What a waste of energy. What a shame, really.

My name is Sharon and I'm 48 years old. Intellectually I know: I am an educated, vibrant, attractive woman. BUT, when I intentionally look at myself in the mirror, I see a tired, middle-aged woman with lines around the mouth. My shoulders are broad and muscular, a good thing, if only there wasn't the "man back" to go with it. My waist is larger than I like it, but not as big as my hips and rear end. I can vividly recall the taunting shouts on the playground, "butt sisters" of my three beautiful sisters and I. Obviously, that was one of those negative experiences of my youth that has affected my self-image.

Sagging, dimpled thighs are my real enemy. To live in Florida and not be comfortable wearing shorts is, uncomfortable, at best. Overall, I think I look **okay** for my age, but I do not feel I look **right**, especially since I'm supposed to be a "personal fitness trainer."

That said, **this** is the way Ed, my sweet husband of 31 years, sees me:

*When I look at you I see a beautiful middle-*

*aged woman that has aged gracefully. Your body is truly a beautiful sight. You are round and perky in all the right places. You are small in stature, but your presence is abundant. You have a muscular body for a female; you have taken care of yourself and continue to do so. You match your job description. You are a beautiful woman full of energy for life. And I love you with all my heart. Truth is I love you inside as much as I do on the outside, if not more. And your body is just icing on the cake.*

Well now — I LIKE that! After reading his perspective, it's difficult to see the same image in that mall mirror that I did previously. This new information gives me a whole different perspective. Life really is a lot about perspective. One can look at the empire state building from a distance and it appears small, stand up next to it, it's actually, monumental.

So, why does our body image so profoundly affect our lives? Think about your life. So many times we (I) think, "If only I could fit into my old ( ) size jeans, I could go out to that party. Oh, I can't visit 'so and so' because they remember me at a size ( ) and now I'm not that any more."

Oh please! Don't look so shocked. I'm sure you've done this more than once!! I have.

Whether you are a man or a woman, society tells us: you must look or be a "certain way." Well, who made those ridiculous, many times unattainable, rules any way? Why do we buy into them?

This really should be about how we perceive ourselves and how we translate that perception into self-esteem. We should respect ourselves for who we are, not for who we may think others see or want us to be.

And while our perceptions may be affected by certain life events, there are steps we can take to improve our self-image:

– It's not nice to insult others, so don't insult yourself.

– When you catch yourself having negative thoughts about yourself, back up a bit and give yourself a break. If after you "get yourself together," you really are unhappy about a certain aspect of your life (and you need to be specific), then decide

what steps you can take to change. Put that self-generated anxiety into action and actually do something about it!

– There is nothing wrong with healthy self-examination. But while you are listing those areas that need improvement, also take time to list your strengths. It really is OK to praise yourself.

In a world that can sometimes cause us pain, see your shortcomings as simply being human.

– When you make a mistake, correct it if you can, seek forgiveness from those you may have hurt, then seek forgiveness from yourself. Then let go of it and move on!

– You have heard this one: Be true to yourself. Your job is not to be what you think others want you to be, it is what you want you to be.

– Associate with positive people. Listen to those who know you the best and love and care for you for who you are. Looking at my husband's appraisal really helps me see the truth. I do not look as bad as I think I do. Not only that, but it really doesn't matter if I did. He sees beyond my appearance and "sees" the beauty within. Thank you Ed!

– And finally, as a person who at age 48 still works out religiously and, as a personal trainer, I know the power of exercising and staying fit. I now train in a studio that focuses on strength training and I know that weight-bearing exercise improves your body and your body image. After all, we are women and we do like to look good!

So, keep it real. Get up and move your body, show off your good energy. Let your positive energy over-ride any perceived flaws you may see in the mirror. They are a minor part of who you are. You are truly as beautiful as you think

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