

Build Your Body Confidence | Created by Hayley Latcham

What is body image?

On a journey where you are aiming to accept and make peace with your body, understanding body image is essential.

Body image is the *"perception that a person has of their physical self and the thoughts and feelings that result from that perception."*[NEDC]

There are four aspects of body image that we will be working on together throughout this program:

1. **Perceptual**, which is how you see your body; and it's important to note here this is not always an accurate representation of how you actually look. The way you see your body can and often is very different to how others see your body, and this is what matters most on this journey to acceptance and body confidence as we're working with your own body image, not how others perceive you.
2. **Affective**, which is the way you feel about your body, which specifically relates to how satisfied or dissatisfied you feel about your weight, shape, and individual body parts.
3. **Cognitive**, which is the way you think about your body and the thoughts that you have about it. This is what can very often lead to a preoccupation with body shape and weight.
4. **Behavioural**, which are the behaviours you engage in as a result of the way you see, feel, and think about your body

Body image is NOT:

- Weight
- BMI
- Dress Size
- Body fat %

Anybody at any shape, size and weight can experience negative body image and body dissatisfaction. There is a common misunderstanding and attitude in society that says *'If you're not overweight how can you feel bad about your body?'* which only compounds the issue and breeds judgment, comparison, shame, and criticism. Have you ever heard someone (or perhaps you've even said it yourself) *"don't be silly, you're skinny, you're gorgeous, I'd kill to have your body!"*

This kind of dismissal of someone else's real experience of body dissatisfaction is a major problem because it makes it harder for so many women and girls to seek

the help and support they need. They fear not being taken seriously and can even feel bad that they feel bad about their bodies! Being overweight or obese is not a requirement or pre-requisite for having negative thoughts and feelings about your body. In fact, many women who compete in fitness and bikini competitions report developing a more severe negative body image than before they competed. There are numerous reports and stories of women developing bulimia and taking laxatives to keep their body fat percentage as low as possible in these kinds of competitions, and the body comparison and dissatisfaction is rampant as the drive for perfection goes up. So even bikini competitors can hate their bodies.

The idea that being thin will make you happy and feel better about yourself is a myth. This couldn't be further from the truth. Many who struggle with anorexia nervosa that are severely underweight can report still seeing themselves as fat. The obsession with thinness as the answer can lead to such warped views of a person's body that even those who get the body they want still end up feeling unhappy and not good enough.

Whatever size, shape, or weight you are, whatever your main issues of concern or struggles are, all bodies are included and welcomed in this program and your internal experience is taken very seriously. Nobody is put against each other in this space. Nobody is compared to another. This is a safe, judgment-free, diverse, and inclusive space. And if you do hear those thoughts pop into your head of either *"she's so much skinnier than me, what is she doing here"* or *"she's much bigger than me, what am I doing here?"* then firstly know that I hear you, I see you, I feel you. You are not alone and this reflects the deep programming that has been going on in all of our lives for years; it is not your fault that you compare yourself to others in this way. I encourage you to invite compassion into this space and an awareness that **97% of women around the world have negative thoughts and feelings about their bodies.**

What we are all here to achieve together is a positive body image so that thoughts about what you weigh and what you eat are not constantly at the front of your mind blocking you from living life; instead, you have room to connect with who you are, your purpose in life, and to accept and appreciate yourself and your body. A positive body image is important because it is also one of the major protective factors which can increase your resilience to eating disorders. With a positive body image, you have greater self-esteem, self-acceptance, and a healthier outlook on life!

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration explains that positive body image occurs *"when a person is able to accept, appreciate, and respect their body."* It isn't about having to love the way that your body looks (and there is more on this in the class 'What Is Body Confidence?') It's about having greater self-esteem; feeling more comfortable and at peace with your body and not being so impacted by unrealistic images and societal pressures to look a certain way. And

it's about leading a balanced life where you are listening to and honouring your body's needs and maintaining a much healthier attitude towards food and exercise.

Regarding a healthier attitude towards food and exercise and what that looks like, it's not about continuing on with the false idea that there are 'good' foods and 'bad' foods; it's not about 'clean' eating or eliminating so-called 'unhealthy' foods—because this is too can become an unhealthy obsession in the pursuit of what the diet and fitness industries have pushed as “being healthy.” And it's not about forcing yourself to exercise hard at the gym 5 times a week. All of these attitudes are ones we examine and challenge in Module 7 of the program.

What is absolutely key is that within the four aspects of body image, it is entirely personal to each individual. No matter what opinions other people share about what they think you should or shouldn't be thinking and feeling about your body, only you can have full awareness, acceptance, and ownership over your experience.

The way you perceive your body is real for you.
The way you feel about your body is real for you.
The way you think about your body is real for you.
And the way you behave because of this is for you and has very real consequences.

And this is the same for everyone at all sizes in all bodies.

The power of this program is built upon community and the values of compassion, support, and acceptance. Together we can help each other through our individual body and eating struggles. I wonder if you could consider and engage with the choice to stop putting yourself against other women now. As you are on this journey, be mindful of your responses to another person sharing about their body image concerns, and be mindful of the way you are talking about your body around others as chances are they may also hold some level of shame or guilt or judgment about how their body looks and the food and exercise practices they engage in.

The solution to this endemic issue is women coming together to support, validate, and respect other women. We are in this together and we are #StrongerTogether.

In the next class we'll be looking at what is body dissatisfaction, why it is a serious problem and what causes it, and in the core modules we'll be diving deep into all of the ways you can improve your body image and your relationship with food, movement, and ultimately, yourself.