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**DEVELOPING A
POSITIVE BODY
IMAGE,
INCREASED SELF-
CONFIDENCE & AN
OVERALL HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIP
WITH OUR BODY**

by Bracha Oriana Fishman



Through my experience with my clients, I've noticed many of them expressing frustration, discontent, dissatisfaction, and sometimes discomfort in their own body. They share with me their stories of resenting the reflection in the mirror and their attempts to avoid, or ignore the unhealthy relationship they have developed with their body. Some clients even have a great deal of insight into this unhealthy dynamic and recognize that continuous neglect or maltreatment of the body, derogatory self-statements, and feelings of anger and irritability only further the divide in the hurting relationship they have with their body, but they still confess: "I'd like to feel good in my body, but I don't know how!" or "I have a healthy body, can even say it's slender and in shape, but I still don't seem to like myself or my body when I see myself in the mirror, or when I'm trying on clothes." or "I would love to have more confidence and feel better in my own skin." To address and honor these questions and all of the different variations of them that I have been asked, I am writing this short blog to help those of us in need of simple steps for

how to kick-start a healthier relationship with your body and take the first steps at being more than comfortable, to being confident & happy in your body and in your skin.

1) Become more aware of the potential impact of cultural norms and cultural influences on how you connect with, understand, and relate to your body.

We often times overlook the influences that are all around us which send us messages about what is/is not attractive, what is/is not healthy, what is/is not desirable. Once you've identified some of the messaging that may have unconsciously seeped in from your family, friends, social media, culture, etc... you can decide if these are/are not empowering and healthy messages. If they are, great! You can keep them as reminders of what is important to you. And, if not, you can make note to self and set a "discard

pile of outdated beliefs." In the place of the beliefs that are old and negative, allow yourself to put in place beliefs that are more truthful for where you are and that will help you to view your body in a brighter light, such as "I can feel confident in my body even though it isn't perfect," "I can be happy in my body even before I reach my ideal weight," "I can recognize beauty in my body, even if it does not conform to what my culture says."

2) Where you may have previously neglected your body, (like consistently feeding your body unhealthy food choices, ignoring the need to having a healthy sleep routine, or overlooking the need for routine physical exams and check-ups) instead, commit to making even one small and simple healthy choice for your body each day and make a conscious and concerted effort to follow through and stick with it.

Maybe you can commit to having a balanced, healthy breakfast, engage in a 15-min walk a week, get to bed at a reasonable time for you and allow for a restorative and uninterrupted sleep, or choose an appropriate dietary supplement. Oftentimes, major transformations begin when we consciously decide to make just ONE, SIMPLE, SMALL CHANGE, which then snowballs into the next simple, small change, and then another simple, small change.

3) Begin to view your relationship with your body as you do your relationship with your loved ones and close friends. Instead of viewing your body in some of the more common ways, (maybe as an object that breeds feelings of disappointment and discontent, or an object that just can't seem to work well enough or need less care, or as a part of you that just can't seem to work the way you desire, or need it to) see how it feels to view your own body as just a part of you, maybe even as you would a close friend, or loved one. This works two-fold: **1st** - it reminds us that our body is but a part of who we are as a being, and is in need of acceptance, appreciation, care, and love in the same way that our children, spouse, or best friend are; **2nd** - it lets us view our relationship with our body as something we can learn to have and to develop over time; it is a relationship that is subject to change, and open to becoming one of your greatest, most fulfilling

relationships yet (with some effort, of course). Now, to begin, think back - what was it like, or would it be like, to develop a truly loving, healthy relationship with another human being - a person who is to become your best friend, spouse, or intimate partner?! What would such a relationship ask for you to bring, or offer, and to be willing to provide?

For those of us who have been exposed to, or grown up in, troubled households, or have had, or been in dysfunctional relationships, this may require using a bit of intuition, or allowing other healthy relationships you may have witnessed, or observed around you, to be your guide. And please know that wherever you are, you can begin to learn to relate to our body in a healthier way, much the same as you can learn the interpersonal skills and building blocks of having a healthy relationship.

For starters, allow yourself to be curious about your body the way you are about your new potential friends. Examine your body and do your best not to make judgments, or impose labels, but just observe it for what it does (again, the way you would a friend). You can even spend some time studying your body and what processes take place in an average human body on any given day. For example, did you know that (thanks the internet and sites like thegkhub.com and medium.com):

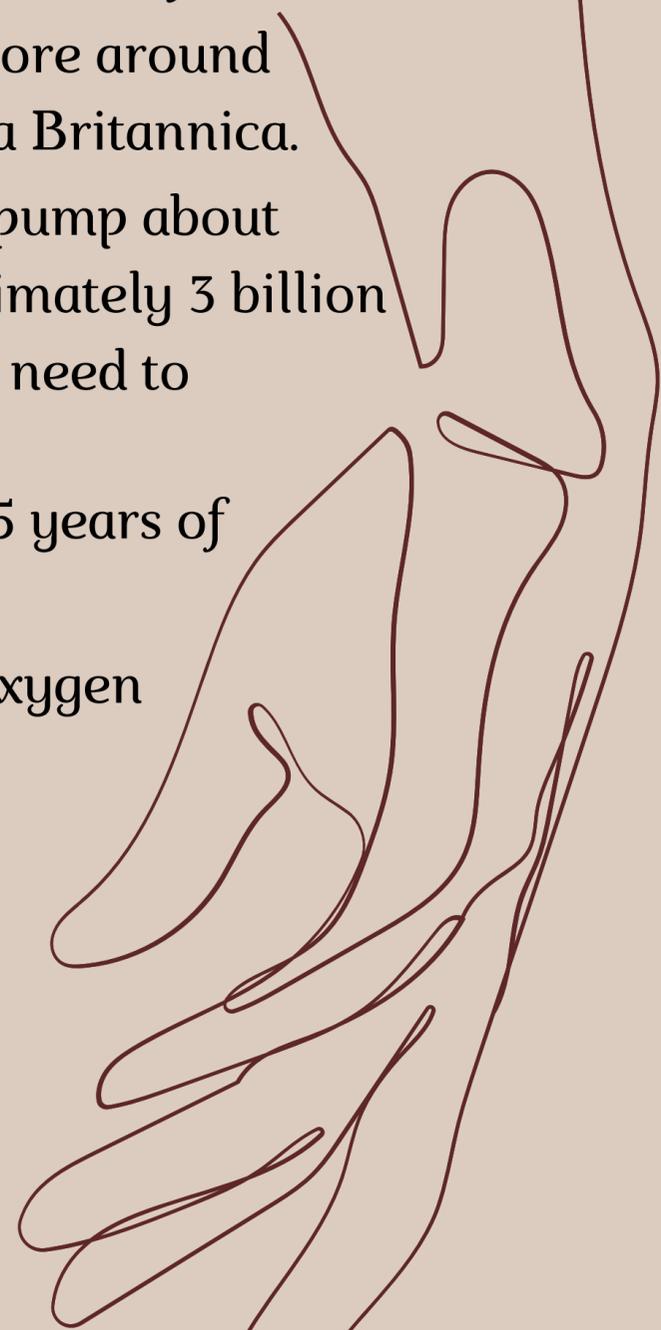
- Average kidneys need to filter your blood vessels an average of 300 times per day.
- In our body you can find, on average, 961,000 kilometers, or 597,138 miles of arteries in the human body.
- An average human body need approximately 30,000 billion functioning neurons.
- The average human eye enables us to differentiate and distinguish between around 10 million different colors.



- The average liver has the ability to regenerate itself.
- The human brain, on average, can store around 5x more information than Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- On any average day, your heart will need to pump about 2,000 gallons of blood and will have had approximately 3 billion heart beats in a lifetime, which you will not even need to coordinate, or orchestrate.
- Your body (and, thus, you together) will spend around 5 years of your life eating food.
- Lungs function to help remove bodily toxins and draw in oxygen and need to do so via an average of 23,040 (unconscious) breaths a day.

I can go on and on, though you're definitely seeing the point. Your body is, quite literally, an awesome mechanism and your very existence within it is like a walking depiction of a Divine miracle.

As in your new friendships, the more you pay attention to, notice, and learn about the wonderful aspects and traits of this person (in our case, your body) the more you experience an increased understanding and, and appreciation. This sense of appreciation for your can be akin to the second aspect of growing this relationship with your body. During this time understanding and appreciation, you every effort to notice both the flaws and the strengths and the weaknesses. But, not, in your new budding relationship, yourself focusing on the person's strengths qualities and forego being critical, or You may even be like some of my friends who, especially in the beginning, were very gracious and forgiving of small mistakes or inconveniences.



And, just as in the start of a healthy, realistic, and balanced relationship, when you aren't ignoring the flaws, sweeping the weaknesses under the rug, or avoiding tackling the urgent matters in communication and boundary setting, at this stage of appreciation for your body, you definitely are aware of what might need improving in your body, you may well know what your friend is horrible with, you may recognize the weaknesses and where your body might need to be strengthened, or tightened, or healed (such as where the extra pounds can be shed, or the acid reflux can be healed, or the sense of physical fatigue may need tackling). However, at this stage of appreciation for your new friend, your body, you realize that you can only develop a healthy relationship with this "person" by expressing positive regard and appreciation for it and recognizing that derogatory, hurtful, negative statements will only tear the relationship down. We can all agree that some of the very things we say to and about ourselves and our body, we would not dare think to even utter to our loved ones.

At this point, you can draw on a number of techniques, including some more common ones from CBT, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and begin to notice the "maladaptive, or distorted cognitions." Basically, begin to notice all of those self-hateful, hurtful, negative statements, or thoughts, you have about yourself and begin to let them go, or replace them. Or, even better, begin to shed some positive light on them. (i.e., from "my thighs are too large," to "maybe they are, but my posterior looks amaaaazing." From "I can't stand my big ears," to "I can't help but love my beautiful lips." From "my body gives me so much pain and discomfort," to "my body may be giving me so much pain and discomfort right now, but I'm working on healing my body and am super grateful for my amazing digestion.")

The next step ...

to be continued

