

## 10 Ways to improve body image

- ***Have compassion for yourself.***

Be honest and kind to yourself as you examine your beliefs, thought patterns, and assumptions about your body and the bodies of other people. This is fruitful but demanding work.

- ***Expand your idea of beauty.***

Expand your concept of what is beautiful. View art. Observe different cultures. Spend time in nature. Constantly remind yourself that everyone is beautiful in his or her own way. Think about people you admire. In what ways are they beautiful?

- ***Let go of perfectionism.***

In the same way that you are learning to accept yourself—flaws and all—you will also be learning to accept your unique body. Striving to reach an arbitrary idea of physical perfection is a form of self-sabotage, and is not possible anyway.

- ***Fully experience your senses.***

Get more in touch with your body by noticing all of your senses. Concentrate on smells, sounds, colors, and touch. Best of all, connect with taste! Eat something you love (that's not triggering). Try something you hate! Your body enables you to have physical experiences, so get brave and enjoy them.

- ***Reconnect your mind and body.***

Certain activities—yoga, stretching, dancing, Pilates, Tai Chi—bring the mind and body together by focusing on the physical experience of the moment. These are wonderful practices for both quieting the mind and building a friendship with the body.

- ***Tolerate negative body talk without acting on it.***

You don't go from [your eating disorder] to loving your body in one day. Acknowledge that it's a process, and that negative body talk is inevitable. But don't act on the thoughts by turning to old habits. Instead, learn to talk back, or decide that you just aren't going to listen right now.

- ***Understand the deeper meanings of negative body talk.***

Negative body talk is a symptom of an eating disorder, just like bingeing and purging. There can be deeper meaning behind the phrases "I feel fat" (I feel worthless), "I have to lose weight" [I need to take control of my life], and "I hate the way I look" (I hate [myself]). When you have these thoughts, recognize that they are code for bigger issues, and investigate.

- ***Talk back to harmful body thoughts.***

When you hear yourself being self-disparaging, talk back. Use positive affirmations and use rational, rather than emotional, language.

- ***Process body trauma with support.***

Sometimes, body image issues are symptoms of past trauma, such as teasing, abuse, rejection, or abandonment. Healing the pain of trauma is a challenging and intimate process. I recommend working with a qualified therapist.

- ***Write a love letter to your body.***

Thank your body for all the good things it does for you. Appreciate it for giving you a life. Tell it the kinds of things you would say to a soul mate, because, after all, your body is your soul's companion!