

Be Comfortable in Your Body by Danielle Fagan

The human body is one of the greatest machines ever made. It comes in all shapes, sizes, colors, types, genders, etc. Unfortunately, we didn't get to choose the parts, but we can work with what we were given. This is the only machine we own for our entire lives. We can't trade it in for a newer, younger model, but we can learn to love it, care for it and make it last as long as possible. Whether we choose strength training or any other form of exercise to keep our bodies in shape, how we think and feel about our bodies is paramount to overall health. Our attitudes, thoughts and feelings about our bodies will play a major role in defining our psychological health. The National Eating Disorders Association defines body image as follows:

Body image is . . .

- How you see yourself when you look in the mirror or when you picture yourself in your mind.
- What you believe about your own appearance (including your memories, assumptions, and generalizations).
- How you feel about your body, including your height, shape, and weight.
- How you sense and control your body as you move. How you feel in your body, not just about your body.

Negative body image is . . .

- A distorted perception of your shape--you perceive parts of your body unlike they really are.
- You are convinced that only other people are attractive and that your body size or shape is a sign of personal failure.
- You feel ashamed, self-conscious, and anxious about your body.
- You feel uncomfortable and awkward in your body.

Positive body image is . . .

- A clear, true perception of your shape--you see the various parts of your body as they really are.
- You celebrate and appreciate your natural body shape and you understand that a person's physical appearance says very little about their character and value as a person.
- You feel proud and accepting of your unique body and refuse to spend an unreasonable amount of time worrying about food, weight, and calories.
- You feel comfortable and confident in your body.

“People with negative body image have a greater likelihood of developing an eating disorder and are more likely to suffer from feelings of depression, isolation, low self-esteem, and obsessions with weight loss. We all may have our days when we feel awkward or uncomfortable in our bodies, but the key to developing positive body image is to recognize and respect our natural shape and learn to overpower those negative thoughts and feelings with positive, affirming, and accepting ones.” Therefore, in order to have positive body image, we need to understand three important things including genetics, society and choices.

First, one size does not fit all. Genetics have determined our height, weight and body type. We can strength train, run, walk, bike, play tennis, and engage in all types of fitness activities;

however, each individual's body will respond differently to the training. Body type, or somatotype, is purely genetic and is a critical factor in determining how the body will develop with respect to strength and musculature. (Brzycki, 18) The body types are as follows:

- Endomorph – soft and round physique, high percentage of body fat; i.e.: sumo wrestler
- Mesomorph – heavily muscled physique, athletic build; i.e.: bodybuilder
- Ectomorph – slender and lean physique, little body fat and muscular development; i.e.: long-distance runner (Brzycki, 18)

Knowing one's body type shouldn't be discouraging to anyone who is participating in a fitness program; rather, it should help keep the goals realistic in understanding what role genetics has played, and what results to expect from strength training and any other type of training.

Next, society has done everyone, especially females a disservice by rewarding waif-like body types and promoting thinness as being the only acceptable way to be successful and happy. Various mediums, including magazines, movies and television promote the ectomorphic body type. The success is evident as sickly thin models grace the covers of Vogue and Cosmopolitan magazines, and as actresses such as Laura Flynn Boyle and Jennifer Aniston have achieved fame along with millions of dollars for their roles in the major television series *The Practice* and *Friends*, respectively.

Perhaps the most notable person that has had an affect on body image is not a person at all. *Barbie*, introduced in 1959 to American pop culture has been the standard by which females have measured themselves. This doll is the epitome of unrealistic, unhealthy body proportions. If Barbie was a human, she would be 5'6" tall, weigh 120 lbs and have measurements of 38-18-34 or 39-23-33, depending on the source. Girls are introduced to this image at very young ages. Unfortunately, being exposed to this message, young girls get the wrong idea about what they should look like in order to have the good things in life and be happy.

Finally, knowing that genetics play a role and society has created unrealistic standards, we are left with choices – choices to make educated decisions about how to use our bodies, how to care for them and most importantly how to feel about them. We know the parameters of our genetic makeup and we can choose to ignore the media. Life is all about making choices to be who we want to be and if we let the media decide how we are going to feel about our bodies, then we are on the path of failure and negative thinking. We can choose to eat right, exercise and feel good about ourselves. So, get out there and start an exercise program at Vertex Fitness, where we believe in positive body image and being comfortable in our bodies and want to help you become comfortable in yours!