

SELF-ESTEEM & SELF-COMPASSION · WORKSHEET

Body Image Worksheet

Challenge appearance-focused thoughts, shift toward what your body does for you, and build the media literacy that protects how you see yourself.

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What this tool does

Body image is the mental picture you hold of your body and the thoughts and feelings that go with it. It has several parts: how you perceive your body, how you feel about it, the thoughts you have about it, and the behaviors those thoughts drive, such as checking, avoiding, or comparing. Negative body image is common, and it is linked with low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and disordered eating.

Much of body dissatisfaction is learned. We absorb narrow appearance ideals from media, advertising, and social platforms, then measure ourselves against images that are often filtered, edited, or professionally staged. Research consistently links appearance-focused social media use and comparison with worse body image, while media

literacy, learning to see and question these messages, can buffer the effect.

Two evidence-based shifts help. The first is cognitive: noticing and reframing harsh appearance thoughts the way you would in any cognitive behavioral therapy work. The second is moving from valuing your body for how it looks toward appreciating what it does and lets you experience, an approach known as functionality appreciation and body gratitude, which research links to more positive body image.

This worksheet is not about loving every inch of your appearance on demand. Body neutrality, treating your body with respect and care without needing to adore it, is a realistic and steady goal for many people.

How to use it

- 1 Catch one specific thought**, a real sentence your inner critic says about your appearance, and note when it tends to show up.
- 2 Challenge it gently**, asking whether it is fact or feeling and what you would say to a friend who talked about their body this way.
- 3 Shift to function**, listing what your body lets you do, feel, and experience, and thank it for one of those things.
- 4 Audit what you consume**, naming the images or accounts that leave you feeling worse and one change you could make to your feed.
- 5 Choose one act of care for the week**, a behavior rather than a feeling: rest, comfortable clothes, movement you enjoy.

A COMPLETED EXAMPLE

A critical thought I often have: *I looked awful in the photos from Saturday's barbecue.*

When it shows up: *Photos, social media*

Fact or feeling? Evidence against it: *A feeling. Nobody said a word about how I looked, and my sister asked for a copy because we were laughing so hard in it.*

A fairer, kinder way to say it: *That is an unflattering angle of a really good afternoon.*

What my body lets me do: *Carry my nephew around the garden, taste the food, laugh until my sides hurt.*

One kind thing this week: *Wear the comfortable jeans instead of the ones that dig in.*

1 Notice the thought

Catch a specific critical thought you have about your body.

What is a critical thought you often have about your appearance?

When does it tend to show up?

☐ Mirrors

☐ Photos

☐ Social media

☐ Shopping for clothes

☐ Eating

☐ Around certain people

☐ Getting dressed

☐ Exercise

2 Challenge it

Question the thought the way you would any harsh, distorted belief.

Is this a fact or a feeling? What is the evidence against it?

A fairer, kinder way to say it

3 Body gratitude

Shift from how your body looks to what it does for you.

What does your body let you do, feel, or experience?

One thing you appreciate about what your body does

4 Media literacy

Examine the messages you take in about bodies and appearance.

What images or accounts make you feel worse about your body?

What is one change you could make to what you consume?

5 Treat your body with care

Care is a behavior, not just a feeling.

What is one kind, respectful thing you can do for your body this week?

Looking back

Which situations trigger your harshest appearance thoughts, and has naming them changed how those moments go?

After a few weeks of body gratitude, is it any easier to think of your body in terms of what it does rather than how it looks?

What happened to your mood in the days after you changed what you follow or scroll?

Sources

- Cash TF. The Body Image Workbook: An Eight-Step Program for Learning to Like Your Looks. 2nd ed. New Harbinger; 2008.
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- Fardouly J, Vartanian LR. Social media and body image concerns: current research and future directions. Curr Opin Psychol. 2016;9:1-5.

Body image weighing on you?

Browse therapists who help with body image, self-esteem, and disordered eating. Free to search, no account needed. Start at psychology.com/therapist.

This worksheet is an educational self-help tool, not therapy or a diagnosis. If body image distress is severe, or if you are struggling with eating or your relationship with food, please reach out to a licensed professional. In the US, the National Alliance for Eating Disorders helpline is 1-866-662-1235. In an emergency, call your local emergency number or, in the US, call or text 988.

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