



An EXERCISE in LOVING YOUR BODY

When I loved myself enough I began to feel such relief.

~ Kim McMillen

We hear so much these days about self-esteem and loving yourself. If you genuinely loved yourself, you wouldn't criticize, complain, or punish yourself - or others. You wouldn't think the negative thoughts that through emotion become physical disease. You would take good care of your body and your emotions and you would be kind and generous with others (and their bodies) because your own core needs are met. Loving your body is foundational.

If you had a toxic upbringing, you may need permission to love yourself, or to be shown what loving yourself looks like. If your parents didn't model unconditional love by taking exquisite care of your infant body – did anyone's do that, perfectly? – you can learn to do that for yourself. Loving your entire self starts with loving your body.

Self-diagnosis Step: **Check in with your body**

Take a deep breath and say out loud (you can whisper) "I love myself." Keep deepening your breath and say it again, feeling internally as you say it. "I love myself."

- Do you smile and feel a flowing warmth in your body? Or does your breath catch and you feel uncomfortable? If you have trouble breathing deeply and saying with sincerity and conviction, "I love myself", you could probably use some self-loving.
- If that doesn't "hit," try the phrase, "I am beautiful [good-looking]" instead. Wanting to feel (or be found) beautiful and desirable – but feeling the opposite - is a huge issue for many people. Before you can take it in from others, this deep appreciation needs to come from you, first.

The most effective way I know to convince yourself that you are worthy of love is to **act loving toward yourself**. Show yourself and the world how beautiful you are. Treat yourself with the same kindness, understanding and generosity you would bestow on someone you were madly in love with.

You can reinforce your new habits with supportive practices:

- Create a self-loving mantra or statement that feels true for you. For example, "I love my body and all it does for me."



- Thank your body, part by part. In the morning before rising and/or just before drifting off to sleep, send gratitude toward your legs that carried you around, your liver that made enzymes for you, your eyes that brought you beauty. Keep going.
- Use your smart phone or computer as a reinforcement tool. Set a daily “meeting” on your electronic calendar – Make the meeting title “Love my Body,” “Check In with Body”, or use a favorite self-love quote (see below for some ideas.) In the notes section, list a few things you can do for yourself to show self-love , e.g. Chew thoroughly; breathe during transitions in the day; stroke my skin; floss teeth tonight.

Our bodies are literal, in-the-moment, animalistic. Your body wants physical, palpable demonstrations that you are lovable, worthy, and beautiful. It understands hugs, touch, and active nurturing as acts of love. It needs your time and attention. It wants you to listen to it and respond appropriately. And there’s no better time than now to start practicing this.

Don’t mistake “stuff” for true self-love:

You’ve probably seen parents who give their kids every conceivable toy and luxury but don’t spend much time with them. The visible message is “You are worthy of all this *stuff*.” The subtle message is, “You’re not worthy of my time and attention.” Which message do you think the body *gets* the most?

EXERCISE : Loving Your Body

Go inside. Take a deep breath. Take three more slow, full, deep breaths. This alone is a self-loving act. Repeat consistently. ;-)

Ask yourself the following:

- Am I treating myself like someone I truly love?
- Do I rest when I need to rest?
- Do I give myself healthy food and lots of good water?
- Do I give myself healthy limits instead of doing self-destructive things like over-eating, smoking, or shopping to fill a nebulous void?
- Do I schedule my days with kindness, saying “no” when appropriate?

If you answered “no” to some of those questions about self-care, the next question is “Why not?” Be brutally honest with yourself and listen. Often the deeper answer is some version of:

- “Because I don’t feel worthy”
- “Because I want to feel loved and satisfied
- “Because I was never shown how beautiful I am”



You may be acting out internal messages of “not love” by mistreating your amazing, loyal body. You can show your body love by listening to it and giving it whatever attention and good care you didn’t get up until now.

Ask yourself: “What does my body *really* want?”

This can be deep work because in order to see what you want so dearly, you often have to look at how your needs aren’t met now. The answers are usually some version of:

- “I want to be touched in loving ways”
- “I want to be able to relax fully”
- “I want to feel appreciated and accepted”
- “I want to feel safe and protected.”

We all want to feel loved and protected. That’s a basic, human need. So what would that would that look like if *you* were the one giving yourself the love and protection you crave? You can give it to your body once you know what that entails.

Treat your body as worthy of love and great care - Actions to increase self-love:

1.) Take yourself on occasional love-my-body dates:

- Take time out of your hectic schedule and put yourself first for one afternoon this week. Indulge your body. It doesn’t have to be expensive. Get creative. Splurge on yourself with time or money in a way you usually don’t. Allow yourself the luxury of a long hot bath—with bath salts. Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate) is a self-nourishing way to ease tension out of sore, tired muscles. Add essential oils for extra benefit.
- Get a massage or spend an hour stretching. Go on a long bike ride. Do something you don’t usually do but know your body really needs. If you don’t usually pleasure yourself (sexually), take time out to do that. Light candles to make it a special occasion. Your body-mind will respond to the demonstration that you’re worth the time and attention.

2.) Find others to **support loving your body** as a habit.

- For example, you can get massages at the same time as a partner, or get them separately—but report back to each other.
- Start regularly walking or running or riding a bike with someone. One day a week is plenty to start a new habit. Stick with it past when you start feeling results!
- Start going to a weekly yoga or tai chi class.

The point is not necessarily to do your body-loving act with another person, but to have



someone to support your showing love to yourself (and vice-versa.) It helps to have someone to brag to, share ideas with, and support you if you're flagging. This is a gift you can share.

3.) Get clear, then take action. Do a thorough inventory of ways you withhold physical nurturing from yourself and take steps to correct those patterns. This is important; start with what's easy and build slowly.

If you don't feel particularly loving toward your body—fake it 'til you make it. Do loving things for your body anyway. Treat your body as if it were a new lover. Your intention and action will shift the feeling. If you wait until you feel loved first, it may never happen. You will come to love it in the course of showing it love.

Turn your habits around *gradually*:

- Stop rushing and schedule spaces in your day to let Life fill with wonder.
- Make it a priority to eat and prepare healthy food one meal per day; eat it more slowly.
- Exercise one more time this week. Start gradually and build on your success.
- Go to bed 15 minutes earlier per night for 4 nights and see how you feel.

Of course the emphasis here is on the body, but if you are being stingy with yourself in other areas that crimp your soul or reinforce a lack of self worth, show yourself love there, too. For me, this would mean putting aside time to make music. That desire is usually at the bottom of my to do list—but it's always *on* the list, so I know it's important to me. You have permission. Just start.

As you learn to enlist your body as your truest life partner, you will wind up looking, feeling, and living better. Here's to your greatest health and radiance!

QUOTES for Inspiration:

People often say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and I say that the most liberating thing about beauty is realizing that you are the beholder. This empowers us to find beauty in places where others have not dared to look, including inside ourselves. ~ Salma Hayek

What a gift your body is! It is your best friend, your most loyal ally, and dedicated protector. Shower it with love, respect and admiration - daily! ~ Denise LaBarre

I stand in awe of my body. ~ Henry David Thoreau

Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live. ~ Jim Rohn

You yourself, as much as any body in the entire universe, deserve your love & affection. ~ Buddha