

Psychological Health

Body Image

How do you feel in your body?

By Irene Hansen Savarese, M.S., L.M.H.C.

Take this quick test to see if you may have a negative body image

- 1) ___ You feel uncomfortable in your body - You feel trapped or stuck.
- 2) ___ Your mood is based on how you think your body looks.
- 3) ___ You weigh your body daily – Used as a measure of self worth.
- 4) ___ You strive for perfection and self-control.
- 5) ___ You feel fat, heavy and depressed.
- 6) ___ You evaluate body according to the fashion industry (the thinner the better).
- 7) ___ You regard food as dangerous for your body.
- 8) ___ You have to exercise daily for hours to feel somewhat good.
- 9) ___ You punish self by inflicting pain to body.
- 10) ___ You can't accept a compliment.

If you checked some or most of the above statements you probably don't enjoy living in your body. You may feel cut off from body feelings and sensations. You may be struggling with weight, eating and self-esteem related issues. Here are some of the areas you may have troubles in:

Sense of Self – Connection to feelings, values and beliefs are weak. You are not sure who you are and what you believe in. You have trouble focusing on important issues. You can't express what you feel. You mostly feel "bad".

Self Worth. You don't believe you are as good as other people.

Capacity For Pleasure. You rarely enjoy yourself.

Empowerment. You feel powerless. You don't believe in own abilities to cope with everyday life.

Intimate relationships. You have trouble connecting to others on an emotional level. You may have trouble leaving abusive relationships. You may be a victim of sexual abuse.

A negative body image is a reflection of a negative self-image

10 simple things you can start doing today to feel more comfortable in your body and like yourself more:

- 1) Only weigh yourself once a week.
- 2) Choose the clothes you are going to wear the night before.
- 3) Avoid mirrors, fashion magazine and comparing yourself to others.
- 4) Eat three meals per day. Hunger set you up for over-eating.
- 5) Avoid dieting. Consider a lifestyle change instead. Choose healthy food you love.
- 6) Choose to exercise for fun. Stop when it hurts.
- 7) Create a positive morning ritual. Start your day on a positive note doing what make you feel good.

- 8) Start journaling every morning for 10 minutes. Write what comes to mind.
- 9) Think about a time where you in spite of your problems were able to enjoy yourself. What did you do? Is there anything that you could do today to feel more joy?
- 10) Ask a friend to help you create a positive affirmation about you. It should be in present tense and describing positive qualities that you have. For example: "I am a valuable, passionate and creative woman". Fill a page daily with your affirmation. When negative thoughts arise in your mind, make a note of them, but continue to write your affirmation. Do this work every day for at least a month.
Warning: This is a very powerful exercise!

Treatment options:

Psychiatrists are medical doctors (MD) specialized in mental disorders. Most psychiatrists use medication to treat mental disorders such as eating disorders, anxiety and depression.

Psychologists, Counselors and Therapists are specialists in psychology i.e. normal and abnormal development. Most have a master's degree (MS) or doctoral degree (PhD) in psychology. They use talk therapy; cognitive-behavioral therapy or interpersonal therapy to help you cope with your problems with eating, anxiety and depression.

Irene Hansen Savarese has a Master Degree in Psychology from Denmark. She is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in Private Practice in Fort Lauderdale. Please direct questions regarding this article to her office at 954-776-0406, Ext 3, or email her at irenesavarese@yahoo.com