

Why improving your body image must come before you lose weight

Most people assume that their body image – their perception of the attractiveness of their own body – will automatically improve after they lose weight. That seems fairly logical, right? If you don't like the way you look now, surely you'll be happier with your appearance once you've slimmed down?

I beg to differ. I would argue that in order for you to reach your healthy weight and stay there permanently, you need to improve your body image *first*. Yes, you read that right. What I'm saying is that hating the way you look *now* is actually a direct impediment to you being able to make – and sustain – the kind of changes in your weight and body shape that you'd love to see.

Here are 3 reasons why:

Reason # 1: Hating your body makes you feel down, and when you feel down you're more likely to binge.

British women's magazine *Top Sante* [surveyed](#) 3000 readers and found that 90% said their bodies made them feel 'down'. 73% said they binged on food, with 32% admitting to bulimic behaviour (bingeing followed by purging, either through laxative abuse and/or self-induced vomiting).

In the course of my extensive work with women suffering from emotional eating, I've learned that there is a direct correlation between those 2 phenomena: when women (and many men) are feeling bad about their bodies, they find themselves irresistibly attracted to what I call 'trigger foods' – foods

that they can't stop eating once they've had a taste. Here's a common thought pattern that many of my clients report, when I ask them what was running through their head just before they started to binge:

"Since I'm so fat already, what difference will it make if I eat this packet of biscuits/tub of ice cream/block of chocolate?"

The despair, disgust and hopelessness underlying this thought pattern are so overwhelming, your unconscious mind will drive you to seek relief... and one of the fastest ways to get temporary relief from these painful emotions is to eat 'hyperpalatable' foods, for reasons I've explained in a [previous post](#). And because these foods not only pack such an enormous calorie punch, but also powerfully reinforce your desire for hyperpalatables and undermine your ability to enjoy healthy foods, every binge makes it harder and harder for you to lose weight.

Reason # 2: Hating your body makes you feel undeserving

In our thin-is-beautiful culture, the vast majority of people associate "fat" with a swag of undesirable characteristics. Here are some responses [women gave](#) when asked what they associated "fat" with:

failure **unlovable** unhealthy uncomfortable gross **ugly** miserable unsightly lazy
unfit ignored sadness **disgusting** sloppy **tired** dumpy **not feminine**
lumbering **missing out** **embarrassing** sloth-like **yuk yuk yuk**

And here are some of the word associations they made with "thin":

loveable more worthy **disciplined** structured organised **sexy** desirable
graceful **light** feminine coordinated **perfect** admirable **energetic** easy **good**
beautiful happiness elegant healthy fit self-controlled

Confronting, don't you think? What I've found over and over again, is that women who see themselves as "fat", with all the negative associations that trail along after that word, don't feel worthy of having the body they'd really like to live in. Not only do they feel judged by our thin-obsessed society; they judge *themselves*. They defer self-acceptance and self-love until *after* they look the way they believe they 'should' in order to be acceptable.

They also have great difficulty seeing themselves as slim even when they've lost significant amounts of weight (see my previous post on [body image lag](#)), so they tend to self-sabotage and regain the weight they've lost.

In contrast, Rachel, after participating in ***The LEAN Program*** wrote to me

"I realised where I was stuck in critical thinking and how I could love my body shape no matter what family or friends think! What I found ironic was the more I accepted myself as fat the readier I became to be thin. So having lost weight I accept myself as I am now and I accept and recognize the 'fuller figured' shape I used to have."

The key here is to *love your body right now*, not to defer that love until you look the way you want to look... because if you hate yourself now, you'll still be hating yourself after you've lost weight – you'll just find new things to hate!

Reason # 3: What you focus on expands

EFT Master and Law of Attraction teacher Carol Look is fond of saying

"You can't get thin when you feel fat."

I agree with her 100%! If all you can see when you look in the mirror is your cellulite, your flabby upper arms, your

protruding tummy, droopy bottom, thunder thighs etc etc etc, you can bet your bottom dollar that's what you'll be getting more of! Conversely, when you can look in the mirror and notice what's already beautiful and attractive about you, you shift your energy significantly, and set yourself up to receive more of what you're experiencing: self-appreciation, gratitude and contentment.

That's exactly what happened to Sona when we worked through **The Mirror Exercise** in *The LEAN Program*. When we began the exercise, she could only notice her "bingo wings", "thick thighs" and "flabby stomach". After we worked through the first phase of the exercise together, she could see her beautiful eyelashes, long legs and attractive hair – a hugely significant shift for her.

When you feel confident about yourself, and in touch with your own attractiveness, you make decisions about food and exercise that support you in losing weight healthfully and keeping it off; you feel deserving of having the body you'd like to have.