

Healthy Body, Healthy Mind Boost Your Self-Esteem

by Jennifer Salter



Most everyone is aware of “body image.” Poor body image permeates our culture, with the majority of women (66 percent!) expressing discontent with how they view themselves. At any given time, the same number of women will be trying to lose weight. That being said, body image concerns span both genders, all cultures and all socioeconomic groups. There is clear evidence that negative body image is linked to serious emotional and health problems, and is correlated with depression, disordered eating and anxiety disorders. These individuals are also more likely to go to unhealthy lengths to change or alter their bodies and their appearance. Body image is connected to the larger issue of self-esteem – and both can be addressed by regular physical activity.

Physical activity helps us focus on what we can do, as opposed to what we look like. Taking pride in what our bodies can accomplish mitigates negative body image. Adolescent girls who are active in sports have much higher self-esteem than girls who are inactive. This is certainly true for adults as well.

Physical activity relieves stress. Many people, when stressed, tend to internalize upsetting situations and blame themselves. Or they may simply focus on what they consider to be their own negative attributes in order to subconsciously divert attention from the actual stressor. Research consistently demonstrates how physical activity can prevent and manage mental health problems like persistent stress, depression and anxiety.

Physical activity helps us project a more confident image to the world. The right exercises will improve posture and allow us to accomplish more without fatigue setting in. Standing strong and tall emanates confidence – and changing our behaviour often leads to changes in our thought processes as well.

Here are a few suggestions for how to mend broken self-esteem:

1. Incorporate moderate cardiovascular exercise 3 to 5 day a week for 30 to 60 minutes.
2. Strengthen the muscles that are responsible for good posture – the back, shoulders, and core.
3. Practice diaphragmatic breathing – inhaling deep into the bottom of your ribcage and exhaling slowly. This can be through nose or mouth.
4. Avoid magazines that portray unrealistic images of women’s and men’s bodies.
5. Keep a journal in which you catalogue all your daily accomplishments, no matter how small. Refer to it when you feel down.

Above all, remember that altering behaviour alters thoughts. So get outside, breathe deeply and enjoy the fresh air!

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~ inspires and coaches others to a higher level of fitness. She has owned her Toronto personal fitness training practice, Lifeline Personal Training, for nearly fifteen years. www.lifelinepersonaltraining.com



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