

A Weight-Inclusive Approach to the Care and Feeding of Ourselves: Applying the Antidote to Body Aggression



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Adapted from the forthcoming book, *Eat to Love: A Mindful Guide to Transforming Your Relationship with Food, Body, and Life*

Because taking a weight-inclusive approach to the care and feeding of ourselves is somewhat counterculture, we may still find ourselves turning our self-aggression towards our bodies. Sometimes they disappoint us, get hurt or sick, or don't fit the narrow standard created by the diet culture. When we treat our bodies with aggression, we often grasp on to what we like, aggressively resist or try to change what we don't, and numb out to what we don't care about.

There are parts of our bodies we are attached to or believe must be a certain way to deserve love and acceptance. There are the parts we hate and want to change to garner approval. Finally there are the parts we disregard or don't even think about. Objectifying our bodies in one or more of these three ways might cause us to downplay other aspects of our lives, to compare our bodies with others (real, imagined, or technologically altered), to "body check" by measuring and monitoring body parts, to avoid looking at ourselves in mirrors or other reflective surfaces, or simply to feel "fat," meaning devalued and disgusted. If we were to quantify the proportion of our worth derived from the appearance of our bodies on a pie chart, compared to other aspects



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of our lives, such as our relationships, work, and spirituality, would it occupy a disproportionately large slice?

The antidote to treating our bodies in these ways is to rebalance our perspective:

- **Re-evaluating our bodies more holistically:** Our bodies are basically good; they are doing their best and they do not want us to suffer. They deserve to be appreciated in their entirety and to be treated with kindness and compassion. In contemplating the basic goodness of the body, we acknowledge that there are parts of our bodies that are easier to accept, those that are more difficult, and those that we don't even think about.

- **Placing our bodies in the context of what we value:** When we inhabit our bodies as the instruments that move us through the world rather than treat them as objects to be honed and perfected for the viewing pleasure

of others, something shifts. With this perspective, we are more likely to appreciate and treat all the different parts of our bodies with respect.

Treating your body as an object to be changed, whether by exercising to fit into your jeans from college, positioning yourself in a chair so that you take up as little space as possible, or angling your phone to take a selfie in which you appear thinner, only makes your world smaller. Viewing your body as the instrument you inhabit while you live your life, such as by marching for a cause, embracing someone you love, standing in front of an audience to speak on an idea that is important to you, makes your world bigger. And better.

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Self-Compassionate Body Scan



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To rebalance your perspective on your body, try a self-compassionate body scan. Wear comfortable clothing and lie down on a supportive surface such as a bed or yoga mat. Take a few embodied breaths, focusing on the feeling of the breath entering and leaving the body. Bring the following statements to mind as you do your body scan:

My body is doing its best.

My body does not want me to suffer.

Feet. Skin, tiny bones, muscles, nails. Support, adaptation. Working together. Finding balance. Bunions, hammertoes, blisters, warts. Often unappreciated. Ankles. Bones, ligaments, skin. Bending, adapting. Accommodating.

Shins, calves. Skin texture and hair. Bones, ligaments, tendons, blood vessels. Muscles that carry me.

Knees. Bones, skin, tiny muscles, ligaments, tendons. Flexible. Absorbing shock. Communicating pain. Always adapting.

Thighs. Front and back. Body's longest bones and biggest muscles. Workers. Storing fat for my safety. Skin, hair, stubble, cellulite. Stretch marks. Change, adaptation.

Hips, pelvis. Skin, hair, bones, muscles, fat. Protection. Center of gravity. Source of power. Vulnerability. Home of my sexuality. Creation, birth, pleasure.

Buttocks. Skin, fat, muscle. Cushioning, supporting, protecting.

Abdomen. Skin, hair, muscle, fat. Stretch marks, scars, freckles. Internal organs I never think about. Stomach, intestines, kidneys, liver, pancreas, uterus, ovaries, bladder. Adaptation, accommodation, change. Nourishment and growth.

Torso, chest. Skin, bones, ligaments, fat. Tiny muscles stretch and support. Ribs that protect. Heart, lungs. Breasts that grow and change over time.

Back. Bones, skin, muscle, fat. Freckles, skin tags, bacne. Spine, vertebrae, nerves, sensory receiver, accommodator, shock absorber, workhorse, pain meter.

Arms. Upper arms, forearms, hands, fingers, nails. Skin, hair, fat, bones, ligaments, tendons. Biceps and triceps. Shoulders, underarms, nerves, and muscles. Connection.

Neck. Throat, voice, breath. Skin, bones, fat. Eating, swallowing. Constantly changing skin. Spine, turning, adapting.

Face. Skin, oily, ashy, dry. Acne, scars. Bones, hair, fat, muscles. Eyes, nose, mouth, eyebrows, eyelashes, ears.

Cheeks, chin, forehead. Connection, expression, communication.

Head. Hair, color, texture, thick/thin, skull. Protection, perception, learning, change, connection. Home to the senses.

Close your self-compassionate body scan with a few more embodied breaths.

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