

# Shame

“Breaking the silence and challenging taboo thoughts about eating are essential parts of the healing process.”



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We can never touch the depths of our vulnerability when we have feelings of shame.

Eating certain foods secretly, and quickly when nobody is around might be a pattern that has existed for many years. Maybe you even don't like the experience of eating in this way (few do), but our minds perceive this fast eating as if we have not eaten anything “forbidden.” Often, these eating habits become a conditioned pattern, with underlying feelings of shame -- and the anxiety of being discovered -- present all the time.

The first thing that we can acknowledge is that this hidden secret of “not being or doing enough” is extremely energy consuming. Becoming aware of the ways that shame plays out in our own experience is the first step toward learning to treat ourselves more gently.

## What types of awareness are helpful?

1. **Become aware of repetitive thoughts** that go through the mind when life becomes difficult. Often, they are lingering self-doubts, such as “I'm unlovable,” “I'm helpless,” “I'm inadequate,” “I'm a failure,” “I'm basically alone,” or “I don't belong.”
2. **Learning to identify the different manifestations of shame.** Sometimes shame shows itself as ‘the inner critic’



(or self-blamer) or ‘the pusher’ (for whom nothing is ever enough).

3. **Being mindful of shame in the body.** Downcast eyes, lowered head, and unstable posture are all natural expressions of shame. Other physical sensations that occur with shame include warmth, or heat and blushing.

## How can we work with shame and build more shame resilience?

The first step is to keep shame from growing. Secrecy (taboos), silence, and judgment are three fuels that help shame grow exponentially. Breaking the silence and challenging taboo thoughts about eating are essential parts of the healing process.

The second step is to focus on our common humanity. Human beings are

born with the wish to be loved, and we need each other to survive. Therefore, we all seek approval and feel social shame when we perceive that we do not fit in. When you understand that we are all struggling with the same feelings and fears, you can connect with our common humanity.

The third step is allowing the discomfort to be present. It takes courage to expose your hidden stories to the light because it is much easier to hide in the dark. Mindfulness addresses each moment-to-moment experience with curiosity and openness, no matter if there are negative core beliefs or shameful experiences.

Additionally, bringing compassion and kindness to the situation can ease the suffering that results after self-criticism. Consciously breathing or softening into the tensed areas can increase your tolerance for these painful situations.

Finally, you can offer yourself words of care and kindness for being in a difficult situation. Talk to yourself as you would talk to someone you love, such as your child or partner. What would a very compassionate friend say to you in this situation? Compassionate and soothing gestures can support you in finding inner warmth as an antidote for the harsh and cold words of shame.

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# Promoting Body Acceptance: Listening to My Body



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The body can be flooded with unpleasant sensations and emotions that range from being tired, feeling “not right” and bloated, disgust, anger, and even hatred of the body. Practicing an acceptance and compassion meditation offers immediate relief from these temporary experiences. In addition, when practiced regularly, it can provide a road map for changing how you relate to yourself long term.

The time to practice this meditation is when you notice that you are being self-critical. The habit of being self-critical may make it hard to recognize when you are down on yourself.

Don't worry if you are in a place of “grumpiness.” This is your signal to check in with your words and your tone, and learn if there is a scolding voice in your head.

To begin this meditation, sit comfortably in a chair or in a formal meditation position. Begin by establishing an amount of time you wish to practice this meditation. If you are new to meditation, consider starting with five minutes and build over time to a longer 20- or 30-minute meditation. When starting to meditate, create a clear intention to practice self-compassion or to work on body acceptance. This intention will help ground you if you



become distracted by thoughts and emotions while you meditate.

**1. Take five deep breaths** to start the meditation. These breaths will help you center yourself and begin to calm your thoughts. After your five deep breaths, imagine you are safe, as you continue your meditation.

**2. Breathe in and connect with your desire for body acceptance.** Keep breathing in and out slowly, calmly. If you find this hard to do, reconnect with your intention to practice self-compassion. Acknowledge the courage it takes to sit across from your inner critic. If you are afraid or emotional, acknowledge that the mind imagines your inner critic will say

hurtful and painful words. You may recall verbal darts from your past that sounded like, “you're so disgusting,” “your body is gross,” and so on. If this happens, reconnect to the present moment by breathing in and out slowly.

**3. Renew your desire to accept your body just the way it is**, despite the verbal or mental darts the inner critic might throw at you. When you accept your body as it is, not as you want it to be, you are practicing acceptance and self-compassion.

**4. If it is helpful, repeat a phase that is supportive**, such as “I am learning to listen to my body.” or “I am learning to accept my body.”

**5. Remain in the present moment**, breathing in and out. With each breath, feel the air fill your body, then feel the air slowly release. You are in the present moment.

**6. End the meditation by taking five deep breaths** to calm your body and mind. Acknowledge the effort that this has taken by saying “I acknowledge the effort that I have made.” Open your heart to the reality that you are not alone and that many people are suffering with accepting their bodies by saying, “May this effort benefit myself and all the other people who are struggling to listen and compassionately accept their bodies.”

*For more information on ways to counter shame by promoting self-compassion, visit <http://self-compassion.org/exercise-5-changing-critical-self-talk>.*

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