

WHAT IS BODY ACCEPTANCE?

Body acceptance is living in a state of peace with your body. You do not expect yourself to reconstruct the frame or basic size of your body to fit society's latest ideal. When you think of your body, it is not always to regret its shape. When you think of living in your body, it is not to dream of escaping it as if it is a trap. Body acceptance is the art of living with the body you have, not wishing for the body you do *not* have. There are different concepts related to body acceptance. One may strike you as more helpful than another.

CONCEPT I: APPLES AND PEARS

One way of understanding the female shape is to banish wishes of the hourglass figure. In the Miss America pageants I studied so closely when I was growing up, all the girls seemed to have the perfect hourglass shape so desirable in the 20th century. Their hips were proportioned with their busts. Their waists seemed delicate. Well, the percentage of women who actually have that shape is low. In fact, as cosmetic breast enhancement grows in popularity, it is clear that other women think they should be shaped like an hourglass, too. Well, that is simply not the norm. Most women are shaped like fruit.

“Apples” carry more weight around the center of their body. Apples like to complain about their bellies and waists. With the hip-hugging pants and small shirts in fashion today, Apples feel their most unflattering features are *exposed*. They are often fine with their breast and hip size, but rail against that belly. Apples think they should have flat bellies. That is actually not realistic for most women. We need some fat around the middle in order to have proper health. That fat is what gives women their endurance in cold weather, the ability to maintain proper body temperature and proper protection when a baby is on board.

“Pears” have a different story. They complain that their bust is too small and their hips too large. They often dislike their shapely bottoms, as they have difficulty finding pants that fit tightly enough in the waist. Pears may also dislike their thigh size, even though they are often muscular in their thighs. Shapely hips and buttocks are more than tools of “good breeders”. They are the tools of strong women athletes who can run faster, play harder and maintain better balance.

It may seem like Apples and Pears are very different, but they are not really. Apples and Pears may share a general dislike and discontentment with their basic body shape. This means that somewhere in their minds, both fruits think they should be proportioned differently. Why? If you are tired of disliking your brand of fruit, stop and look around you. If there are so many apples and pears in the world, how can they be wrong?

CONCEPT II: FOCUS ON HEALTH, NOT APPEARANCE

If your health is pretty good, but you focus on how your body looks on the outside, maybe it's time to think about the mechanics. Your body probably treats you a lot better than you treat it. And yet, so many people think only of how their body looks in clothes or what they weigh. Isn't that a bit critical? It's like telling a child that the C on

the report card is a bigger deal than the 4 A's. Where is your gratitude? Are you pleased with the degree of health you have been blessed with? Try practicing thoughts that focus on your health.

Rather than buying the shoes that are "in", buy the shoes that are attractive and comfortable at the same time! Rather than feeding your body whatever strikes your fancy, try balancing your food choices at each meal. Try not to get too hung up on the scale. Try zeroing in on the health value of what you eat. It will help you to manage weight and maintain good energy levels throughout your day. You will sleep better and have better cholesterol and heart health, too. Health-oriented people are concerned about how they treat their bodies, because they keep a basic fact in mind: we are given one body to take care of.

CONCEPT III: THE COMPARISON TRAP

We all have fallen prey to the images of beautiful people we see on TV. We want to look like them. Guess What! *They* would like to look like they do on TV in their real lives! With the advances in production of movies, photos, makeup and lighting, it is more fantastical than ever. Those women who are perfectly thin often suffer with eating disorders which developed as they were pressured to be stars. How about being the star in your own life? You get to eat well.

By Beth Rogers-Doll, PhD

Doll & Associates www.dollandassociates.com