

HOW TO LOVE YOUR BODY

By Sebastian, The Food & Body Coach

INTRO

Would you like to learn how to love your body?

I hope you said yes, otherwise we'll have to say goodbye way too soon, and I think in this book, I've collected some pretty awesome tools, that might be able to help you.

I'M SUPER EXCITED!

The reason I'm so excited to share them, is because these are some of the very tools I used to begin to transform my own broken body image, and now, I can honestly say, that I love my body very, very much.

Every day is a celebration, but not because every day is easy. What I'm offering up here is not easy. What I'm offering is an opportunity to work. That's what I do every day, and the pure joy that I get from my practices at loving my body are too good to miss out on, because whatever body you're in, it is worth celebrating.

You might however, have been led to believe otherwise!

The culture we live in feeds off of our insecurities. We are told to change every aspect of our bodies to fit into the 'ideal', but the truth is that this measure of beauty is manufactured by industries whose motives are profit, profit, and more profit.

Industries that make billions from convincing us that we're flawed, and that with the next facial cream, diet, tummy-tuck, face-lift, boob-job, cut, burn, stretch and remould, we can enhance and extend our lives.

I'll be willing to bet that you probably already know this, or at the very least, have had a vague suspicion that we are being preyed upon by big industries who just want our money?

I don't blame you however for potentially knowing that these industries are just after profit, but still buying what they're selling anyway. No, I don't blame you. I can't blame you.

Why?

Because I'm exactly the same!

But why, why, why, do we continue to be slaves to their system?

Well, it's genius really. The human condition makes us obsessive with (at least) 2 pursuits:

1. WE WANT TO FIT IN:

It's human nature to not just want to fit into the cultural norm, but to feel a great need to fit into the cultural norm. In times gone by, not fitting in to your tribe would have meant being an outcast, and that would've severely limited your chances of survival. We depend upon one another and so opportunities like food, shelter, and sex, would've been limited to you.

This isn't an old, outdated, model either. It's very much still in play in today's society. It is our nature. In fact, you only need to look to when you were a child in school and how obvious the social dynamics affected the lives of all the kids. Bullying as an example, is often an issue amongst children in schools, but hierarchies, and power struggles, don't disappear from the threshold of adolescence to adulthood. No way Jose! They just become a little more subtle. Unless of course you're a politician!

So fitting in, is a survival strategy. When advertising shows only one type of body; predominantly young, white, skinny, girls/guys, they can be incredibly intoxicating messages. Especially as advertising works by association. Models, regardless of colour, shape, or size, are generally people picked with extraordinarily attractive faces to the rest of us. They are often unique, and it's natural to find them appealing. However, by associating their look with any product for sale, we fall into a very clever little rut, that has us obeying their messages.

The by-product is a sense of anxiety to fit in, as we become cash-cows, to be milked, as our primal needs are exploited.

2. WE WANT TO LIVE LONG, HEALTHY, LIVES (POTENTIALLY FOREVER!):

The other common way in which we are sold to, is by appealing to our mortalities and sexual market value. We all have a window of youth. In that period, we are most fertile and capable of fulfilling our agendas of creating more babies. That may not be what we desire in our conscious thoughts, but to be youthful is an outward sign of being ready to fulfil our most basic functioning.

On top of that, we're bloody animals! Every animal is hardwired to survive. Just watch any nature programme while the predator hunts the prey. The prey doesn't just sit and accept it's fate. It struggles. It runs. It panics.

We struggle, and run, and panic, too; cursed with the knowledge of our constant state of being hunted by, Time. A hopeless dash from the inevitable end, but we do it anyway, because that is our survival instinct. Take any avenue, or escape route, to elude our pursuer.

Selling us creams, and surgery, and diets, are all tapping into that deep nature that just screams at us to claw at life. Saying that you can look younger, fitter, healthier, and more fuckable, is a deal that would almost be illogical to refuse based on our design.

One day, the technology may be available to genetically engineer us to an 'ideal' human frame (whatever that is), but in the present world, empty promises seem to be the most consistency that any diet or modification sales are offering. At least that's something, right?

THERE'S NO ESCAPE!

But what can you do about those two aspects of yourself that are so vulnerable to clever marketing?

Well, thankfully we can't change our nature.

I know I said 'thankfully!'

Huh? But, why?

We are born to obey these laws and they offer us too many benefits to want to change. Things like striving for better health care, cures to diseases, stronger global communities, and technological advances.

Our desire to live, and flourish, is creating the most fortunate time our species has ever known!

So, what can we change?

Well I hope, that if you haven't realised it yet, that you're coming to the awareness, that the change in you, has to come from you!

You have to be the change.

This life isn't fair and so what I'm offering up can be an even harder pill to swallow and it's this:

TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Taking responsibility for how you feel about your body. Taking responsibility for how much love, and respect, and kindness, you receive each day.

I know it's the obvious answer to look to external sources for the blame. I remember being a teenager and I was so angry at the world. So angry for bringing me into it and not cuddling me, and nurturing me, and holding me tight. I was hateful, and I wanted revenge. I wanted to let everyone know that I had had an unfair life and that I wanted my money back.

It was a sense of entitlement based on a Disney notion of the world, that I deserved a perfect life. That I had been promised the high life and things weren't what all the fairy tales said they would be.

Things changed for me though when I was 20 years old.

One day, I walked into an acting class, and I got the shock of my life. I found in my teacher a man who was even angrier than I was!

He was so angry, it was scary. But he wasn't angry at life.

He was angry at me for not accepting the gift of life.

This was a man who screamed... often! His voice took over the whole room and I could do nothing but listen. The message I remember the most was literally on my first week in class. I had felt very brave, getting up on stage before any of the other students had volunteered themselves, to enact a scene from a play, and thought my courage would make me a star before the rest of those slackers!

My rude awakening came not 2 minutes into my scene, when he stopped my work and began to deconstruct the petulance and immaturity I displayed, and how far away I was from honouring the life of the character I had intended to. He told me, that I would never be able to do justice to a single character as long as I insisted on living my own drama first.

He was right.

I recognised his words immediately as a challenge to grow, and as the only strong, male character in my life at the time, I was desperate to change, and prove to him, and mostly myself, that I was capable.

Anyway, I progressed in the class, but it took me years of work to deconstruct the sense of self-entitlement I had built. It wasn't easy, but it taught me that I cannot ask life for anything. That I have to be willing to not blame anybody for my life, and where I find myself right now in the present moment. EVER.

Isn't that crazy?

How can you actually take full responsibility?

BUT WHAT ABOUT...?

But what about your upbringing?

What about your family?

Your school teachers?

Those people who made those hurtful comments that changed your life forever?

Aren't they to blame?

Sure, you can blame them, but if you are truly looking for a quantum leap in the quality of your life and how you love your body, then my humble advice is that those people and experiences were just passengers on *your* train; Opportunities where you learnt valuable lessons, and that helped strengthen your mission in life.

That acting experience, and my new found sense of responsibility, helped me to learn in my bones that the quality of my life will not be changed by anyone or anything else. Only I had the power to change me, and only you are so powerful to affect you, however, as long as you play the victim narrative, like I once did, then you will always be stuck in the mentality that someone, or something, owes you.

Nobody owes you.

Let me say it again... NOBODY OWES YOU!

Nada. Nothing. Zilch. Diddly-squat.

Not your parents. Not your partner. Not your boss. Not the bullies or the culture, and the unfair expectations.

Only you owe you.

You owe yourself the world. The fullest, most vibrant, lived experience that you're capable of living, and that glorious body that you inhabit, is your vehicle to do it in.

That body of yours, is your gift and birth right, to explore and experience this wonderland that we call life.

ARE YOU READY TO STAND UP AND TAKE YOUR BIRTH RIGHT?

I know it's a lot. There are a lot of people in your history who may have done you wrong. More wrong than I can even imagine, and I'm so sorry that they did what they did. Some traumas are too big to be reversed by the words you read on a page. Sometimes a therapist or other professional help is the best possible option, as you may not be ready to make this shift. That is a legitimate feeling, and I hope you honour where you are, and do what's right for you, but if you are someone who is ready to make that change now, then this book is for you.

It doesn't mean you need to be perfect. In fact, perfect isn't a route available here. It is about being willing. Willing to try. This is just a short collection of ideas, and the path will look different for everyone. Each chapter contains a new concept, but non of the ideas that are not given are intended as quick fixes. They are given as lifelong practices. They are timeless, and precious. I myself still practice all of them. I forget them at times. That's only natural. But I always come back to them.

Another recommendation is not to feel the need to tick off each chapter as another task done, but to go at your own pace. To maybe read through the whole book and see what you absorb. See what resonates with you. Maybe you go back and read parts again. Whatever takes your interest, and don't worry if parts are not to your liking. You may not like any of it, but my greatest hope is that if you can take just one message from this book, then it will have been worth it.

That message is this...

THAT YOU ARE WORTHY

You are worthy of loving your body.

You are worthy of being loved.

You deserve to feel the happiness of freedom in the body you use everyday, that serves your living experience.

SO, ARE YOU UP FOR THE CHALLENGE?

I put the challenge to you. Are you ready to try? Are you willing to open up your heart to the possibility of finding true love within yourself?

The challenge I set down isn't easy. It requires you be contrary to all the conditioning you've been brainwashed by, which is especially tricky, because many people are still in that system. In fact, you can guarantee that most people, including your friends and family, will probably still be highly influenced, and running on auto-pilot settings, for how to hate their bodies, and criticise others.

What makes this challenge even harder is that it will never stop!

That's right. It is a practice for life, because sure enough, you will get older, and your body will change and that, as a part of nature, can involve many changes that are (perhaps) unwelcome, but part of the human experience non-the-less. It is the justice that time deals out to everyone. From the supermodel to the rest of us mere humans. No one is exempt.

Oh, and one more thing before we begin. You should know that there is no particular order to the layout of this book, so if you're a crazy mo-fo like me, then you might just go to the chapter that sounds most appealing straight away, and to hell with numerical order. Your choice!

So here goes. My small collection of super-duper, power-boosting, upgrades, that you can use to block out the harmful messages of body hate and most importantly, cultivate messages to yourself of body love that actually stick.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. HOW TO LOVE YOURSELF
2. ACKNOWLEDGE THE PAIN
3. NUTURE YOUR INNER CHILD
4. STOP COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS
5. FOCUS/BELIEF & LANGAUGE
6. SELF-CARE
7. MOVEMENT/EXERCISE
8. LOVE YOUR BELLY
9. PRACTICE GRATITUDE

CHAPTER 1

LEARN HOW TO LOVE YOUR BODY

Have you ever been told to 'just love your body' by someone before?

To 'just accept your body and who you are'?

Are you maybe finding it difficult to love yourself because you don't even like yourself or your body image very often?

Are you sick of hearing well meaning advice like this?

Well you're right. Just love yourself isn't enough so what can you do to change your body image?

WHAT IS LOVE ANYWAY?

It may at first glance sound like hippie, flower power stuff, but I firmly believe that loving yourself is an important key to ending your struggle with body hate mentality.

But how do you do it. Where do you begin?

I want to show you, but be ready, because even though people say 'just love yourself' there's nothing easy about my approach.

First of all, the major shortcoming of the word, love, is that it's incredibly vague when you think about it. I mean really, what is it?

It's a bit like a soul isn't it?

It's nothing tangible.

If you were in a relationship how would you define it?

Can you?

Have you?

The act of loving is subjective in every sense.

One person might define love as providing for their family financially. Another gives love by doing the household chores, or planning thoughtful dates and weekend getaways. Maybe

buying gifts, cuddling, and Netflix in bed, taking care of an elderly parent or helping a complete stranger.

These are all acts. But what fuels them?

What is that mushy, or diligent, or dutiful or whatever essence that inspires acts of love?

In my relationship with my partner I decided to question my use of the word, love, and what inspires me. I mean, I use the word maybe everyday, and yet what am I really saying?

I LIKE TO ANALYSE THINGS!

So I decided to break it down. I like to analyse things. Maybe too much sometimes, but I felt disingenuous saying a word that I couldn't quite define so I wrote a list of words I believe define my intentions of love towards my partner, but I was pleasantly surprised when I realised that they translated perfectly, if I applied them to myself. To my own value system of how I need to feel love from myself and in my body.

I'd like to share my list of words with you and some examples of how you can begin to love yourself and your body. I have tried to give you something more concrete. Words that if you said them and I said them, we would roughly mean the same thing, but I invite you to use them and define what they mean to you. So, in no particular order:

MY LIST OF HOW TO LOVE ME!

- **TO BE COURAGOUS-** I will always fight against self-pity, no matter how convincing the problem I encounter. I will try and be brave and stand up to my own self-criticism as well as from others.
- **FIRE (ANGER)-** I will protect myself against any threat. I deserve a place in this world and if I have to fight for my right to be in it then I will. My state, language, and tonality are emotionally charged when I am angry because someone has overstepped a boundary of mine. Anger is not a disease nor a negative emotion. It is my way of letting someone know that I do not want it to happen again. I try not use bitter, hateful or critical words. I simply express a truth and then move on.
- **PATIENCE-** I have an eternal well of patience for myself. Sure, I am only human, and I inevitably fall short at times with self-destructive language and actions towards my body, but this is the only body I have and I will practice consistently how to look at things in the long term, and not beat myself up for ambitions unachieved.
- **FAITH-** I have the utmost faith in myself that I am doing my best. I do not have a blueprint for this life, but I believe that I am worthy of believing in myself, and using positive, affirming language to reinforce my convictions.
- **ACCEPTANCE-** I accept that I am exactly as I am. The 'flaws' of my body are my perfections and even though I strive to improve my quality of life, I will never go against my nature to satisfy anyone else's standards of how I'm meant to look.

- **RESPECT**- I may at times find it difficult to accept my body but I can always try to respect my body. It gives me a home and many people in this world are not so lucky to have a body that is as well functioning as mine, so I will respect myself by never talking bad about myself. I only speak highly of myself.
- **FORGIVENESS**- I forgive any and all things I do. I am only human, and mistakes are part of the process of living. I offer myself forgiveness without exception. I only ask to learn from the occurrence.
- **UNDERSTANDING**- I never want to judge myself, and so if I don't understand an action I've taken, but I feel upset or confused by it, then I try to work the origins of what I did, and perhaps why. I seek to understand all of my behaviours that aren't obvious at first because therein lies the clue on how to improve.
- **JOY**- I shower my body with my utmost joyful self, be it practicing smiling for no good reason other than to feel good, or being grateful for all the amazing things my body does for me. I want to walk predominantly in joy because when I do so I feel high, and my days have such value.
- **HONESTY**- I will always commit to honesty by living my truth, no matter how difficult it may be and no matter how many people may disagree with my stance. I am uniquely me and I want to always honour that.
- **PERSISTANCE**- I refuse to give up on myself. No matter how hard my journey can be at times, I will continue the endeavour of body acceptance.
- **PRAISE**- I will always congratulate myself for any and every little thing that I do that is worthy of celebration, because I am my own biggest fan, and I cannot rely on anyone else to adore me as I have the capacity to adore me.

I realise some of these may have been repeated in parts but its ok. The repetition of ideas just informs a more coherent model of my idea of self-love.

What would your loving words towards your body be?

The same?

Different?

I challenge you to sit down and really hash out how you want to be loved. And as well, could you break them down even further into actions?

WOULD YOU KNOW HOW TO WRITE YOUR MANUAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR LOVE?

Into real life actions that are so specific that if you had to give someone a manual on how to love you, you could give them clear instructions that left little room for error?

I want to go into a little more detail to show you how specific you can get with your demands for how you need to be loved by yourself.

Let's take, joy, for example. Joy, like love, can seem pretty vague until I break it down into small, specific, actionable, and measurable parts. For me joy means:

JOY

- Smiling
- Jumping up and down
- Playing sports and exercise
- I have to stop and smell flowers whenever I see them.
- I like to have a little dance most mornings and stretch into my body with some funky music.
- I like to play the guitar and sing some days
- I feel joy from going into nature
- I need to get enough sleep

That's not an exhaustive list of what gives me joy, nor the quantity I need them all in, but they are certainly the most important things that I need. Non-negotiables that are dependent entirely on me, and yes, even smiling is not a reaction I wait for to happen to me, but an action I do.

SHOULD YOU FORCE SMILING?

Something interesting for you; Smiling actually releases endorphins which are a neurochemical which can give you a euphoric feeling like being high. There is a lovely quote I read from the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, that goes 'sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.' What he means by that, is that you don't need to wait for life to give you a smile. If you want to feel joy, you can just smile.

What all of my joyful requirements had in common was that they were all actions. They weren't vague. They were specific and so it puts the responsibility of feeling love in my hands.

If, as an example, you're someone who works hard and barely has any time for themselves, then how can you find joy if you cannot nurture your own needs? Self-love is not necessarily a 10 point action plan, but it does have requirements.

For many of you, if you treated the partner you're in a relationship with, with the same kind of disregard as you do yourselves, it's likely you would lose that person for them feeling neglected, unless you pulled your act together, and started paying them more attention!

BUT IT'S NOT SOMEONE ELSE....IT'S YOU!

It's you, and you take yourself for granted more than is fair. You need to take measurable action now otherwise you will be waiting for love for an eternity, not realising that you are the only one responsible for the feeling.

Also, remember that, joy, was only one facet of many qualities I need for love.

Let me remind you quickly what mine were they again:

- Courage
- Anger
- Patience
- Faith
- Acceptance
- Respect
- Forgiveness
- Understanding
- Joy
- Honesty
- Persistence
- Praise.

WRITING THINGS DOWN HELPS IDEAS BECOME REALITIES

So lets get to writing down your own definitions of love immediately. Your manual on how you need to feel loved won't write itself!

OH NO, I HAVE TO WRITE SOMETHING DOWN!

You thought I was gonna make this easy for you right?

I know that whenever a book calls upon you to be interactive, it can be a bummer. You just want to skim through and maybe do the exercises later. I understand, but if some of what you've just read might seem in any way like valuable information to you, that might potentially benefit your progress to body love, then I urge you to not rush to the next chapter. Great lessons in life are often simple, but the effectiveness of them are in the practical application of being interactive rather than just an observer.

You could read an entire book of the wisdom of Confucius, or other proverbs, that contain the knowledge of thousands of years in a sentence, but the map is not the territory, and knowing what to do, isn't the same as understanding it, and actually doing it.

DID HE JUST COMPARE HIMSLEF TO CONFUCIOUS?

I know, I know, that was a bit cheeky! Admittedly, I don't have quite so much wisdom, but the point I'm trying to drive home is that if you can engage with this interactive element then you'll get a lot more benefit from it.

The list might take you a while, but if you believe you are worthy of love then I recommend taking the time to do this. I promise you it's worth it. Get specific and stay focused.

IF YOU WANT AN EXTRA CHALLENGE...

Here's an extension on that exercise if you want to gain yourself extra brownie points, and that is to review your progress. By that I mean to document your journey, and make a daily review of how faithful you are being to this new, loving relationship. How were you best able to honour your list of intentions and how will you try and improve for tomorrow?

Remember, there is no judgement if you are not the perfect lover straight away, hehe! You have the gift of patience, and you realise that anything worth truly having will take time. This is after all, the most important relationship you'll ever have. You can cut yourself as much slack as you need.

So just to wrap up, this exercise is intended as a way to stop love being some abstract concept and gives you a very structured task. I hope that you can begin to accept responsibility for your own development of love, creating a contract with yourself about how you deserve to be treated because honestly, you're worth it.

THE MOST IMPORTANT LOVE

To love yourself is hard

It requires commitment to joy and tears

It's not always easy fun or fair

And it requires maintenance for all your years

But if you decide to go without

You'll never be satisfied by another woman or man

So learn how to love yourself now

Because you're the only person who can

CHAPTER 2

ACKNOWLEDGE THE PAIN

If you want to love your body, and celebrate it, then you'll first have to accept it as it is.

Accepting that which you've been told is wrong by our culture, can be some hard-ass-shit to deconstruct.

IT'S PAINFUL

I believe that one thing many people struggle with, is going face to face with the pain, and hurt, and upset, and disappointment, and whatever else, regarding their body.

Sometimes we can be so used to just taking so much shit in life, that we learn coping mechanisms to numb ourselves out from the pain inside, but the pain is still actively chipping away at us, regardless of whether we consciously perceive it or not.

I FORGOT HOW TO CRY AND SO THE PAIN STAYED INSIDE

In that same acting class that I went to, that I referenced in the introduction of this book, I also learnt to cry for the first time in 4 years. It didn't come easily as I had intentionally closed off that part of myself when I was younger. I just felt dead inside for a long time, but I also knew that there was a tempest raging inside me that was trapped, and thrashing, and tearing at my insides every day. I was full of so much conflict and more emotions than I had allowed myself to process, that I was too paralysed to scream out the bitter, angry, sad, wails and sobs that I needed for my release. Pain that I had held for a long, long time.

You may find yourself, where you are right now, not even able to face your body in the mirror. Not able to celebrate it. Not able to enjoy it.

I want you to know that those thoughts are not you. They are the insidious influence of our culture. Those feelings might well be rejection. Shame. Sadness. Those are implanted, but they are not you.

I remember the most traumatic period of my life was so heavily influenced by feeling rejected, and alone, so that my thoughts in my head became more than a little bit loco. I had terrible things going in my mind, and even though they make me sad to think back on, the only way I came to fight those daemons, was to look to myself in the mirror and say, ok! This is what I've got. What am I gonna do with it? Be a victim or get myself together and fight for everything I wanted in life?

I chose life!

YAY! LIFE

By turning away from ourselves. From our reflections and what we are, we live in denial. I'm not here to say that it's easy. That it's easy to look yourself head on in the mirror and make peace with the person who looks back. I'm saying that it's you. It's all you.

YOU CAN'T OUTFRAN YOUR BODY!

Actually, one way in which pain can be put to the side, and ignored for a while, is adopting the idea that we are not our bodies. That our bodies are just vessels for our souls or whatever else, and while I agree that we have more value than the way our bodies look, we do ourselves an injustice by centralising our human experience to just our thoughts. We start to believe then that we are just a brain, manoeuvring this flesh suit, but I don't believe that's so. When we do this we stay in our heads and rely on the intelligence that we can perceive with our eyes, but when we acknowledge our bodies, we allow every tingling sensation, from raised hairs, hearts skipping a beat, intuition about a situation, to butterflies in the stomach, and all the wonderful feelings that words can't capture, to make up our sensory experience of this world.

I understand that if the body you have is not one that is so easily accepted by others, then it can seem quite appealing to want to distance your identity from your body, but I urge you to reconsider. Reconsider like your life depends on it, because the pay-off is huge.

Courage isn't the absence of fear. It's being afraid and doing it anyway.

The following are some ideas that you might try playing with to help you to face the pain head on like a boss.

IDEAS FOR EMBRACING THE PAIN:

1. SCREAM & SHOUT:

Seriously! Sometimes this is the best therapy ever, ever, ever! Often we are so contained and without a way to express ourselves. You may have had something that really upset you, but you didn't have a safe space to release what was going on. Finding a time later to bring it back up, and having a good old scream like when you were a kid, can feel like a massage for your soul.

You might be comfortable doing it anywhere or, like me, you might want to find a quiet place. When I did this a lot, I didn't really have much privacy so I just had to

close my door and let it rip in my room while my family probably thought I was performing an exorcism, but maybe if you have a local mountain, or hill, or isolated space where you can really let it go without fear for others hearing you, then it really makes a difference. You could also use a pillow to muffle the sound a little which is more practical, and now that I think about it, probably a more reasonable suggestion!

I actually screamed my words to the works of Shakespeare. My teacher had recommended us to investigate the poet's work for inspiration. Who else could have had the answer so perfectly prepared of blood curdling texts to match my feelings inside. I found my partner in the play Henry V. The scene in particular was a declaration of war and it was as violent as my thoughts. It also gave me license to sound really cool while I expressed genuine pain!

2. CRY:

Much like shouting, crying often allows us to release. I personally don't always cry when I'm sad. It's not always convenient and I still have a habit of saving up my pain. I do however find music to be highly emotive, and so I only need to play a trigger song, and that allows me to bring up tears in seconds.

Do you give yourself permission to cry, and if you do find it difficult, then what might your trigger be, to let those tears out?

3. BASIC RELAXATION:

Our bodies hold our trauma. This is another reason why we cannot dismiss the body as some cumbersome beast that our sentient mind has to lug around. We store our unspent emotions in our muscles and limbs, and every sinew of our body. If we don't have an immediate way to vent or express our feelings, then they become stored and the body is a space with vaults that go deeper than we can imagine.

Basic relaxation is an acting tool that I learnt, and a powerful way to connect with your unexpressed pain, and any other emotions that may not have air to breathe. It's almost like a meditation, and it has many similar benefits to it, like helping you to care less about what others think.

More confidence?

Yes please.

It helps you do this like any other comfort destroyer.

How?

Well, imagine walking up to a complete stranger you find attractive, for a dare, and asking them out on a date. It's probably not that fun right? In fact, it can be pretty darn scary if you're not in the habit of doing it regularly. But now imagine instead that you've asked out 10 people in a row (without alcohol!). After 10 people, you won't care nearly as much how they respond. You will be so much more in your skin, and so much more you.

Right?

Well basic relaxation is just like that. It will make you uncomfortable at first. You will have to be willing to look silly, sound silly, and feel... well, maybe silly if that's where you're at emotionally, but more accurately, it will allow you to feel like you, and when *you* are centred in yourself, *you* are the most powerful force on this planet. You are unshakable when you are your most resourceful, and congruent self.

So, if that sounds like the kind of self-connection you'd like to experience, then without further delay, let me break down how you can do this powerful exercise.

- First, I recommend finding a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.
- Next, you want to sit in a chair. Not a sofa, but something more like a wooden chair, so you don't fall asleep and stay alert!
- Then you want to close your eyes.
- Next you want to relax your whole body without sliding off your chair!
- Begin to take deep, calming, breaths.
- You might notice, as you begin to take calming breaths, that parts of your body are holding tension. Areas like your shoulders for example. If you do, then just allow them to relax. Allow your chin to drop to your chest as your head is a heavy load to hold as well. You will probably notice that if you are truly relaxing your face, that you will start to dribble a little! That's completely normal if you're really relaxed.
- Then you want to ask yourself the question "Where am I right now?" By that I mean, where are you emotionally? When you first start this exercise, it can be very difficult, but that's what we're trying to work on hey!

You may well say to yourself things like "I feel hungry". "I feel bored". "I feel fine". That's ok, but your mission is to uncover all of the other juicy emotions going on

underneath, and if you're reading this, then I suspect that there's probably a lot going on. You are looking to identify emotions. You may only notice one isolated emotion in the beginning, and that's ok too, although over time, you may well notice that you are feeling multiple emotions at the same time.

This question of "Where am I right now?" is one you will continually ask yourself throughout the exercise. It is your guiding light.

- Next, you will want to notice your breathing. Can you align with it? Many of us have such short, and contained breath, that it's not until we become attentive to it, that we notice how shallow our breathing is. Do this for as long as you need to feel more relaxed.
- Next you will begin to move your body. By that I mean lightly stretching in the chair. Your eyes will stay closed, and you will move each part of your body. For example, if you feel tension in your shoulders then you can begin to roll them up and down. Shrug them. You can gyrate so much of your body while seated. Your torso, and your hips especially. Use the visual of spinning motions you'd make with hula-hoop around your waist, to help you imagine the motions. Lift your feet, and legs, one at a time, off of the floor, and roll your legs in their sockets. Stretch and extend them as far as they will go. See if the stretch can almost pull you out of the chair. Roll your arms in their sockets too.

It might actually be most helpful to start from the head down to the toes, top to bottom, to help you find a little more structure in it all.

You might start at you're your neck. Try scrunching your face up, and then relaxing it. Have a good yawn. You can even massage your cheeks, your temples, and your shoulders a bit. Maybe you'll twist to stretch your back, and really move into it. Can you enjoy that stretch? Remember that much of our tension is locked in our body and the strangest part of your body may hold the most information. For me, sometimes stretching out my feet and rolling them around, unlocks so much pain and sadness.

Try and roll, and stretch, and spin, and turn, each part of your body at least twice, and all the while still asking the question, "where am I right now?"

- The next step is to make sound as you move your body. By sound I mean a light, continuous sound, and exhale with an open mouth. Think of people making that oommmm, sound while mediating, but just keeping your mouth open. Sound is important because so often in the moment when the emotion was original felt, sound was not allowed to go with it, and so you may find a lot of emotion coming into the sound. That's perfectly fine. Just allow the sound to be as organic, and

continuous as you need, all the while moving your body, and asking yourself “where am I right now?”

It’s very much an exercise that asks you to be present in the moment.

Also, don’t worry if it doesn’t seem like you’re doing it right. It’s about what feels right. It will look silly, which is why I recommend finding a private space, so you can be fully you.

This might take you 5 minutes or 20 minutes. Go with the flow and see how you feel.

4. TALK TO SOMEONE:

Be they therapist, friend, family, or perhaps even a Samaritan, on the end of a phone, vocalising your thoughts on your body and potential pain can allow you to heal. Therapists are great not only because they are trained, and skilled at guiding you, but they are also paid, which means you have a guaranteed ear to listen. That might sound a bit funny to some, but we need to be listened to in this life and if you’ve kept a lot in, for a long time, then there’s no telling how much you might need to let out.

People you know can also be amazing if you have the right network that you can trust with opening up. In many cases, friends and family may not be used to you opening up, and so expecting them to take the initiative to start that conversation could be a painful wait that never comes.

It will often require you to bring up something that you’d like to talk to them about, or maybe even just have them listen to you, and asking them if they’d be willing to be that person in that moment, for you.

Essentially, what I find effective is someone who can handle your emotions without getting afraid or trying to pacify your experience. Someone who can handle what might be unknown to even you, and will reinforce the experience as a positive one that you’ll want to repeat, by being a rock to your tempest.

5. WRITING IT DOWN:

Just writing down what’s on your mind can be very helpful at times. I love to write, and sometimes I just need to see my thoughts in front of me. It’s not the same as talking to someone, but it is acknowledging any given number of thoughts at a time, and this is so useful because often we know what’s going on inside, but we don’t *really* know what’s going on inside.

Everything can become so cluttered that we get used to the mess like an untidy room; We think that we know where everything is, but the reality is, that many things get lost in plain sight.

6. MAKING ART:

Art is great because it has no limitations. It is a culturally accepted way to scream, shout, cry, bang, bop, and thrash, and as we all, know, some even make a living from doing these kind of behaviours.

Now obviously, your medium will be whatever you enjoy or are interested with. It could be painting, acting, singing, playing an instrument, dancing. Whatever floats your boat. For me, it's singing, and whenever I feel a blockage, I turn to my guitar (which I'm really bad at), to help me just be in my skin, and make noise.

7. BOXING (Physical exercise): Boxing has to be one of the greatest ways to just unleash your beast. It could actually be any physical activity to be honest, it's just boxing is my personal preference! There's just something so intentionally aggressive that comes from using your fists that unlocks something primordial in us.

I've had so many clients in the gym who seemed so sweet and innocent, but then when I showed them the boxing gloves, they would all of a sudden remember some pent up frustration that they needed to get out, and we have a great session. I'm a big fan of boxing for many reasons, and this is definitely one of them. It's bloody cathartic!

8. DRAW A BODY MAP:

Draw an outline of your body, and then within it, use coloured pens to map highways, and routes that you feel sensations and emotions. Perhaps even thoughts. You can get as creative as possible.

It might be easy to assume that your critical voice about your body is only in your head, but might that voice be represented somewhere else at the same time? Some people describe balls of fiery red, just hovering around their chest area, or sometimes heavy, pulling grey chains. It's not about being right with what you draw. It's simply about how you represent the emotions, sensations, and thought, that come up around your image, and anything else for that matter.

You might think, "what's the use in that", but I promise you, that an awareness of what's going on in your mind, can help you to become more acutely aware of when

you talk to yourself in a disempowering manner, or feel negative influences from the outside world, and that can be a radical step to challenging those voices.

ARE YOU EXCITED TO SCREAM?

So those are some ways you can begin to get in touch with your feelings and emotions. It can be incredibly painful for many to try even one of these exercises, so please be kind to yourself, and remember that the journey is meant to be long, but that doesn't mean that each step doesn't count, or that there won't be great joy along the way, because there will be, and ultimately it's all so worth it, I promise :)

SCREAM!

**Sometimes you want to scream
But you're afraid of the damage you'll cause
You have such a build-up of rage
That you could crush the heavens to the floor**

**Your fear of what's inside
Is just your reaction to the unknown
Unrecognisable daemons in your soul
Over the tortured years have grown**

**But the world is not so fragile
It's a mothers' compassionate arms
It can take your bitter anger
Do not fear you'll do this life any harm**

**Let your voice and body free
You've held them in far too long
Express your deepest upsets
On the world that's told you you're wrong**

CHAPTER 3

NURTURE YOUR INNER CHILD

The words we use to talk about our bodies and who we are, are very important. Mostly because we believe them! Many people however, are not exactly using a caring voice when talking to themselves. It's not a huge surprise though when you consider how many people rarely hear, or have ever heard, kind words from other people about their body.

I mean, how can you know what a loving voice sounds like, if you've never really heard one?

WHAT DOES A LOVING VOICE SOUND LIKE?

It's a voice that celebrates your body and has the skill to get the best out of you in life. The kind of voice that encourages you, and always believes in you.

That's no easy task. I mean really, to constantly be praising you, and adoring you, is a high-pressured job that truthfully nobody could do....

Except for you of course! You are the only person who can give yourself that real unconditional love.

I KNOW, SUPER CHEESY!

So, here's where the whole concept of nurturing your child comes in. You see there is a child that lives in all of us. All of us at our cores are kicking, screaming, irrational, impetuous, sensitive balls of gooey emotions, and feelings.

We are delicate, we bruise easily, and above all we need love, but without that love, it's easy for your inner child to get hurt and begin to feel inadequate.

THE PARENT AND THE CHILD

You the adult, are there to nurture your inner child's needs. To be patient, kind, firm, protective, and above all, compassionate towards your child, because you need to know how vulnerable your inner child really is.

But again, the problem is, that this caring adult voice is not something used by many people on themselves. Instead, what is sadly too often the tone, is an abusive and judgemental parent. A voice that has been tainted and corrupted by the body-shaming culture we live in.

The reality is, that every time many of you try on a new outfit, look in front of the mirror, go to a party, the beach, a wedding... you name it, you are highly critical of yourself. A critical parent to your inner child.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

Does that sound like you by any chance? Could you possibly be an abusive parent to yourself?

What kind of things might you be saying to your inner child? Maybe things like, you're so fat? You're so ugly? Look at your arms. Your big gut. Your face. Your hanging skin. Your stretch marks. Nobody wants to see you naked. Cover up.

You might say that you don't do that.

And you might not even realise you do it!

I'm not blaming anyone who does. I myself have also been guilty of that level of self-deprecating abuse, and honestly, sometimes I still slip back into it. It's difficult not to at times when every advert around us is telling us we're inadequate, but I have a challenge for you...

I challenge you to monitor your internal dialogue when you stand in front of the mirror.

MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL

Really, I mean it. Just count how many times you say negative things about yourself in your head when you look in the mirror and really try to pay attention to what you say, because sometimes you're meaner than you think!

You might say sure, but I don't like my arms and belly fat, etc... so why should I lie to myself and say good things when I don't believe it myself?

Well then, imagine for just a second, if a parent kept criticising their kid's weight. Imagine a parent sighing with disappointment, and leaving a snide remark, every time they saw their child for no other reason than their appearance!

Would you think that was normal? You would freak out if you saw that happening right? Of course, every parent wants the best for their kids, but does shaming anyone into doing something sound like an effective way to you?

SHAMING DOESN'T HELP ANYONE, LEAST OF ALL YOU

You too contain all the beautiful things a child does, and you are sensitive to a world that is scary. The last thing you need, is to be your own worst enemy.

I mean really, what would you do if you saw a parent in the street saying to their son, or daughter, what you might say to yourself in the mirror every day?

How would you react? What would you like to say to that parent? And what would you like to tell that child to comfort them afterwards so that they believe they are worthy, and acceptable as they are?

IS YOUR CHILD A BULLY?

It also works outwards, as in, what if your little child spoke badly about another child in the playground? Either to their face, or behind the other child's back. Would you support your child's actions?

Do you speak badly of others?

Why is it important? Well, because it all contributes to this fat phobic culture we live in.

Or, what if another kid bullied your inner child?

HOW DO YOU PROTECT YOURSELF?

In day to day living, that discrimination might look like somebody throwing you an abusive comment on the street, or even your own family making comments on how much food is on your dinner plate, and how fast you eat it, as examples.

So then, picture yourself as the child, standing there. Standing in that moment, and all of a sudden you feel these strong, protective hands on your shoulders. They are welcome hands of safety in your time of need. And then also imagine yourself there as the adult, resting your hands on your small child's shoulders, and holding them with a light, but firm squeeze, to let them know that you are not going anywhere, and that you will guard them like the most precious thing in the world.

In that position, with you as the child, what would you want your adult to say to others? How would you want to be protected?

TONALITY HELPS

It can also be very useful to work on an internal tonality. For example, you might internally have the voice of your inner drill sergeant, screaming at you to love yourself. You know that, don't stop, never give in kind of rhetoric? No pain, no gain.

Well, be careful not to fall into old, bad, habits, as that voice might just be your dieting, perfectionist, voice in disguise, that is now instead barking at you to love yourself.

Everyone is different, and ultimately, you're creating your own unique branding of self-propaganda that you want to play on loop in your head, which means that one person's idea of a caring voice, may not align with another's, so see what works for you.

My own internal dialogue is pretty embarrassing to share, but, I hope it will help you find yours, because in your head no one can hear you!

So, for example if I've eaten too much and I feel a bit sick, I'll say something like, "Hey there buddy, you've eaten well today? Isn't it nice to be able to fill yourself up? Aren't you a lucky boy that you have access to food that nourishes you when so many in this world don't! And even though you feel sick, it's ok. At least now you know for next time what your limit is and how to honour that limit, so that you don't have to feel this sick feeling again!"

I GIVE MYSELF HUGS- HUGS RULE!

I know, I know what you're probably thinking. That's ridiculous talking to yourself like a child, but that's just my point, and honestly, I do this every day in my head, and I even give myself hugs when I'm proud of myself! I always make sure I acknowledge my achievements, and soothe any fears with that same kind voice, because it really works. Radical self-acceptance works.

What have you got to lose?

What would your voice sound like?

Can you hear it?

Are you willing to create it?

Perhaps you never had a compassionate voice from a parent and so you're going to have to redefine what that means to you.

And if you can remember being a child, especially if you were a child in a bigger body, but you didn't get enough of a compassionate voice, then can you think how you'd like to have been treated? To have been nurtured?

Can you now begin to visualise that adult? That grown up who'll take care of you?

This doesn't just happen overnight by the way. It takes time and practice, but I imagine you've been banging your head against a wall with your body image and confidence and so sometimes it takes something a little out of the box to make a necessary change.

A POEM TO THE SELF

More than ever I need your love

I have no one else in this world

Promise me you'll hold my hand tight

As the uncertainty of life unfurls

CHAPTER 4

STOP COMPARING YOURSELF TO

OTHERS

The slogan 'just be yourself', isn't so tempting, when you consider that society is constantly telling you to change, and saying that you can achieve any change you want, if you pay enough money, work hard enough, or starve for it.

THE CAVE OF WONDERS

A long time ago, there was another world on this planet, hidden underground, underneath the hot, Arabian, sand. This world was a great big cave of wonders. There were treasures littering every inch of the floor, piling up so high that the walls were completely obscured, and the glare from the riches was so blinding, that the ceilings sparkled like golden rivers and lakes, suspended above this infinite fortune, that spanned as far as the eye could see.

The cave was home to all the people of the world, and here nobody was poor because everybody had an abundance of wealth, available in every direction.

The inhabitants inherited their treasures when they were born, from their parents, and family. Each individual owned mountains of riches, and were clothed from top to toe, in the finest gemmed garments.

The people were always fascinated with the natural twinkling that dazzled from every angle of the cave, and enjoyed discovering many more riches as they grow older, picking up new treasure, but naturally having to let go of others, as their hands, and pockets, got too heavy.

One day, a young woman name Joslin, was walking through the cave of wonders for a stroll, when she heard a loud man, sparkling in a strange, all green outfit, screaming at everybody through a microphone, that if people wanted to have special green emeralds like his, then they would have to climb the money mountains in the distant lands, and reach their peaks to claim their prize.

Now Joslin had never heard of emeralds before. She'd never even seen this colour before, and even though the man in green was a very compelling, and intelligent speaker, she didn't take any notice of him and his advice, until she saw that nearly the whole population of the cave, in all their glorious array of colours, were scrambling forlornly up the perilous ascent of a mountain in the distance, chasing the burning green light, which beckoned them all to the top.

Joslin was so confused about the hysteria that the green man with the microphone had caused, that she decided to ask him what on earth was happening.

“Excuse me Mr. Green. I might seem a little bit naive here, but what is so special about the emeralds that you’re talking about, that has everyone climbing over one another to get to?”

“Well you see young lady, the emerald is the best precious stone in the entire cave. I inherited mine from my family, but not everyone can be so fortunate, and so from the good charity of my heart, I decided to share a way that people could be more like me.

I’ve seen many emeralds at the peak of that perilously looking steep money mountain over there, and so I thought I’d give everyone else the opportunity to be like me, and be green, and tell how to find it.”

“But”, replied Joslin, “won’t we then all be the same colour of green if we all wear emeralds?”

“Of, course we will”, he chuckles. “That’s the point. Don’t you want to be like me?”

Joslin didn’t want to be rude and so she decided it was best to not answer, and just leave while he continued shouting at people to go and get their emeralds.

As she turned away, she felt confused. Joslin was covered in rubies you see. She’d always enjoyed her rubies. They had a red majesty about them that made her feel special and connected to her family who had given them to her, but now this loud man had gotten everybody chasing emeralds and so Joslin began to ask herself, “Am I the one who is wrong? Should I be up there with everybody else?”

So, Joslin went home to ponder this question for a few days on her mountain of rubies. The shiny, red, village that she came from was nearly deserted as everyone had gone to try and claim their emeralds. The only people she could see around were the hobbling injured people, who had returned from trying (unsuccessfully), to climb the mountain, but had fallen from great heights.

She also noticed how different they now looked compared to before. They seemed to have a crazed look in their eyes; a desperate hunger for something seemed to have overcome them, and some had even started trying to throw away their own rubies in an effort to prepare themselves for emeralds.

“Hum, interesting”, observed Joslin. And she sat and thought some more.

As the days went on, she continued to ponder in her same spot, feeling more and more conflicted. Finally, after a long period of silence, she suddenly jumped up and said, “How can I be right about my rubies being enough, when everyone else is trying to get emeralds? Am I missing something?”

Now she was even more confused and so she decided to take a journey to the village of her partner to see what she thought about all of this.

Her partner, Sarah, was from a very beautiful village of diamonds, and so Joslin thought she would have some wisdom to share worth listening to, but when she saw Sarah, she noticed she was sad.

“Why are you so sad Sarah?” Asked Joslin.

And Sarah replied, “because, my love, I am poor.”

“But who said you’re poor?”

“Everyone! Everyone, has said it, and everyone in my village has thrown away their diamonds, and are climbing naked, and bruised like possessed mad men and women, for this ultimate treasure. I need to go and get it.”

“Wait, wait, a second”, begged Joslin. “Surely, you can’t think that emeralds are worth more than your diamonds, can you?”

“Of course! Everybody says they are the most valuable.”

And in that moment, Joslin looked at Sarah, whose body was sparkling in prisms of multi-coloured refractions of light, that danced with all the other glorious colours of the tribes of the cave. Sparkling so much and Joslin was overcome with sadness for seeing her love, blind to what she could see so clearly, and she cried, “but can’t you see that you are already rich? Can’t you see that you are beautiful?”

“No, Joss, I’m poor. I hate diamonds. If I don’t have emeralds, then nobody will ever love me.

“But I love you!” pleaded Joslin in desperate sobs. “Diamonds were what made you special. The reason I managed to spot you amongst the crowds of people in this place. I found you because diamonds are my favourite.”

Sarah was so touched by Joslin’s love, and adoration of how brightly she shone, that she decided to keep her diamonds. They hugged, and celebrated Sarah staying the same.

Joslin smiled, and let go of Sarah, and tried to wish her farewell.

“But where are you going Joss?”

“Well, it’s all well and good you being rich, but now I know that you think emeralds are the best, I know what I need to do. I’m off to climb that mountain.”

“.....Hmmm, and maybe I should hire a personal trainer to help me prepare!”

“PSYHC!”

THE THEIF OF IDENTITY

Comparing ourselves to others is a thief of our identity and living experience. We are all different, but as the current climate insists on selling one body type, which is typically the thin, white, young, model, we find ourselves questioning our value against others.

A LACK OF REPRESENTATION

If your body type, is not a common type represented in the popular culture, and the media, then it's only natural for you to look to what there is available.

We all need role models who we can relate to, and we need a selection to pick from. If you only see the best roles in movies, and governments, and positions of power, as people that look different to you, then how closely can you relate?

When you look at your skin, and shape, and size, how do they compare with the status quo of celebrities and influencing voices?

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

We need more of every shape, size, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and more. We desperately need role models, and it's not so that you can compare yourself to them, because inevitably the people we see through the media, regardless of whether they are of a marginalised group or not, are still often, model standard of beauty, but we need them none the less so that we know that we're not alone.

That day will come, but in the meantime, what are some useful tools and tips that you can employ now, to stop comparing yourself to others, and start living your unique life?

1. REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE UNIQUE:

The world needs you to be you. As Oscar Wilde famously wrote, "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken." It means that you have a unique gift that nobody else can offer the world, but in order for everyone to see you shine, you have to be fully in your skin.

2. UNPLUG FROM CELEBRITY CULTURE:

Celebrities and models, are everywhere. Magazines, movies, TV, and on every inch of advertising space, promoting the latest perfume, or clothing item, or whatever. Media industries sell us not only a look that is mostly unattainable, but they also sell us their story.

We know all about Brad Pitt, and Kanye West, and whoever else. We are sold their dramas and lives, like a soap opera. We become more knowledgeable about the latest celeb, than we do about ourselves, our families, friends, or our communities. Once we have been hooked by their drama, we are far more susceptible to being sold products from those people.

Celebrities sell because our culture adores them. We are being marketed to, and manipulated all the time.

The next generation of celebrities are found on social media. You may buy their products, but how they really dim your shine, is by taking your attention. You may spend excessive amounts of time on Instagram, as an example, looking at profiles of people and thinking their lives are so amazing. People intentionally post pictures to give you the illusion that their lives are perfect, so that they can boost their own self-esteem, and sell you whatever it is that will earn them a profit.

Be they traditional advertising, or new digital marketing aimed at you, your focus and attention are being stolen at every opportunity, and if you allow your focus to be held, you will naturally start to compare your body, and your life to theirs.

FOCUS = FEELING

Whatever you focus on in life, you will feel. If you focus on the lives, and bodies of others, then you will inevitably start to feel inadequate.

Why?

Because you can't possibly look like everyone else, and be living the lives they're living. You can only be you, and every second that you're giving to an external source that doesn't empower you, they are profiting from you.

So, my honest recommendation is to unplug from anybody, or anything, that doesn't leave you feeling more enriched than before. Anybody or anything, that doesn't propel you, on your journey.

3. FIND YOUR TRIBE:

I know I've said don't compare yourself, but on this one occasion, I believe that looking to our ancestors and our ethnicities can provide a great sense of relief and connection.

Why?

Because in doing so, we identify who our people are, the tribes we've come from, and the lives that have informed our own.

We are direct extensions of our ancestors, and the more we can learn of them, and their lives, and their struggles, and hopes, and dreams, the more we can humble ourselves and recognise the journey they made for us to be here, with this life, and connect to gratitude.

THE TREASURE YOU OWN

Your body is a treasure

That blinds me, I'm in awe

And I enjoy your riches

Even if you believe that you are poor

CHAPTER 5

FOCUS/BELIEF & LANGUAGE

To improve your body image, it's essential that you learn a new language, but I'm not talking about learning Spanish or French here. What I mean is the language of self-empowerment.

But what exactly is it and how do you learn it?

THE LANGUAGE OF EMPOWERMENT

It is specific and intentional language to counteract the venomous, fat phobic, food obsessive, all or nothing vocabulary, that either you are using against yourself, or that you're using against others....or both.

I want to share with you how to begin speaking the language of self-love, but before we talk about the actual words, to understand this new language you need to understand about your focus and belief systems.

FOCUS & BELIEF SYSTEM

You see whatever you focus on in life creates your belief systems.

That means that regardless of whether it's true or not, our focus becomes our reality. For example, you feel great all day and full of so much energy that you decide to honour your body and go to a workout class. Afterwards you go home and just before you eat a delicious, and nutritious dinner, to complement your training, you decide to weigh yourself.

UH-OH!

You are shocked to see that you actually weigh more than when you last weighed yourself, and so you say to hell with the dinner, and gorge on your favourite treats to the point of feeling sick, and lose all motivation to repeat the gym experience. Before you had weighed yourself, you felt on top of the world, but afterwards you feel terrible, and it all changed in one second.

How?

In reality nothing actually changed did it. You still weighed the same before when you felt great, but what did change was your perception, and so your focus changed, and whatever you focus on becomes your new belief system. Your new reality.

That is the incredible power of focus and belief and I'm sure if that example isn't familiar then you can fill in your own examples of something similar.

What's amazing however, is that you can actually control your focus, and belief systems, so that they benefit you, instead of waiting for something, or someone else to change them for you. That means you can actually take responsibility for how you feel.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR LANGUAGE

This is where the new language comes in. By simply changing your words you can directly affect your focus and belief, and your focus and belief, gives momentum to your words. You see they feed one another.

It can be the words you say to yourself in your head, or the words you say out loud to others.

When we talk to ourselves we do so in one of two ways:

1. MAKING STATEMENTS

2. ASKING QUESTIONS

Think about it. That's all we actually do when we talk to ourselves. We are either saying statements like "I would like to eat this" or "I hope I can catch the train on time" or we're asking questions like "can I eat this" or "will I make the train on time." That makes it pretty simple to analyse our systems of speech, and then make some big changes to them.

QUESTIONS:

People ask questions of themselves like: Why am I so fat? Why am I so useless? Why can't I just get my act together and go to the gym, stick to my diet and sort my shit out? Why can't I get rid of these flabby arms, this chin, this belly, etc, etc, and the list goes on and on.

The quality of your questions and statements will determine the quality of your life.

If you continue to focus on disempowering questions, then your answers will always come back as disempowering.

WHAT WOULD YOUR GOOGLE SEARCH SAY?

Think of your mind like Google. If you type into google "why am I so fat and ugly?" then Google will spit back hundreds of pages, and none of them will be flattering answers.

So, what's the solution?

You need to start using new, empowering, questions, to counteract the old, dangerous, ones.

How would you go about doing that? Well, let me give you some examples of some powerful questions you can use, but before I do it's important to remember something. You have been using these old, destructive questions on yourself for so long, and they are so strong, and engrained, that the only possible chance that your new questions will have, is if you use them a lot.

You will need to repeat them again, and again, and again, until they are second nature for you.

Here are some ideas for powerful questions and scenarios to go with them:

- **SITUATION:** You look in the mirror, and you don't like what you see. Normally you might use destructive language on yourself and be self-critical.
- **EMPOWERING QUESTION:** How can I use this time in front of this mirror to appreciate myself more than normal?
- **SITUATION:** Somebody makes a rude comment about your weight or appearance. Normally you might close up, hide away, and take the attack as a reason to binge eat.
- **EMPOWERING QUESTION:** How can I better prepare myself with a response to the next person who thinks they have the right to talk to me in that way? Also, how can I offer myself reassurance in that moment that their words are their own experience, intolerance, and ignorance, and not my own?
- **SITUATION:** You find a personal trainer, who you thought could help you enjoy exercise a little more, but instead they fat shamed you, and made you feel like you needed to change.
- **EMPOWERING QUESTION:** What can I do differently next time when I search for a PT? What have I learnt about the process of finding one, and how will I ensure that the next time this won't happen again?

Do you notice the common theme in all of these examples?

They are all assuming forgiveness, and self-compassion, immediately. Each example completely leaves the habitual blame gaming, and instead, focuses on what has been learnt, or what can be improved without a shred of judgement. Compassionate, but also allowing room for introspection and growth.

Pretty cool, hey!

Now what can yours be?

Can you think of some now?

I know that might sound like a big challenge, but waiting until an event happens isn't the best way you're going to make good use of this tool. It's far more potent a weapon, if you can pre-prepare powerful questions for a whole host of scenarios before they even happen.

Just think of common situations that are more than likely will happen again, and see if you can invest in preparing a little protection for your future self.

Also, the better you get at preparing loaded questions, the better you'll be to just make them up in the moment, and the more compassionate you'll notice yourself growing over time, as it becomes second nature.

STATEMENTS:

Typically, my clients make statements such as: I'm so fat, I will never find a partner. I'm so stupid and useless for not sticking to my diet. Everyone always looks at me when I eat because I'm so greedy.

These statements become beliefs and the more we use them, the more ingrained they become, until they become our truth. You have probably focused so long on a such statements, that they are now the reality in your mind.

THE SOLUTION?

You need to start making your own empowering statements. But first, statements might otherwise be known as affirmations. If you're not familiar with this term, then just think of the business man before a meeting, pacing up and down in the bathroom, and then looking in the mirror with his game face on, and psyching himself up by saying things like, "I'm the man. I'm the best damn salesman in this company, and I'm gonna blow the bosses away with my amazing sales pitch", or something that sounds super corny like that.

Of course, that might seem a little over the top, but trust me, affirmations work.

The trick is to create affirmations that are unique, and personal to you. Statements that you can actually get behind and are things that you want to believe in so much, that you don't feel silly saying them.

Here are some ideas for powerful statements/affirmations that you might like to use on yourself. I recommend thinking of at least 3:

STATEMENT IDEAS:

- I'm so hot (great as a habit for every time you look in the mirror)
- I'm so sexy
- I'm so beautiful
- I am always worthy of love
- I love my belly and I will never suck in again
- My calm cannot be disturbed by anybody
- I am a giver of joy because I am joy
- I am always in charge of my own happiness

Be as bold as you like and understand that they are true. Your belief system is just catching up to your new reality you are creating.

I recommend having at least 3 consistent statements, so that they really stick with you. They're so effective that I often find myself just repeating my statements to myself in the middle of my day, or even better, situations when I need them the most, because I've said the same affirmations so many times.

Repetition really is integral in them working. It's no good just saying it once and thinking its magic. You need to repeat them again, and again. 10, 20, 30 times, and more, and consistently, every day, because chances are you're not going to believe yourself at first.

You know why right?

Because you're still listening to someone else's script about how you're not good enough. Trust me, your negative talk might sound like your words but they're not. Those words came from someone else or our culture.

Aren't you tired of listening to someone else's beliefs about who you are?

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE OUR OWN POWER?

A big mistake some make with their saying their affirmations, is with their level of conviction. That means that when many attempt them, it's only really a half-hearted effort. I mean, if you sat there, saying to yourself something like "I deserve love. I am worthy of love", but your head is slumped, and your shoulders down, and your tonality low, then is it going to work?

Hell no!

And then what do you say afterwards?

You say "you see Sebastian. I told you this silly affirmation stuff isn't going to work", and you're right, it doesn't work! But it's because you didn't go all in!

YOU NEED TO SUMMON YOUR ENERGY TO BE EFFECTIVE

So how about instead if you stand up; that's important! No general ever inspired his troops while sat down on his arse.

So, you get up. You pace up and down. Maybe use a fist at the same time as you say the affirmations, and punch the air while you do it, or use some other physical movement, with determination in your voice. Pull your shoulders back, lift your head and chest up proudly like you're in control. Or maybe you even hold your hands on your heart, and say your affirmations with absolute calm and sincerity. It depends what sensation you're trying to cultivate, but doesn't that sound more likely to work if you really become theatrical with it?

Of course it does!

Let me tell you something, even if you don't believe yourself at first, if your body is congruent with how you want to perceive yourself, and how you want the world to perceive you also, you can transform your belief, and as we now know, our focus and belief affect our language, our language affects our actions, and our actions affects our focus and belief. It is cycle, and once you gather momentum, it snowballs, becoming a self-regulating habit.

And if that wasn't enough, research has also shown that affirmations are a great way of treating things like depression, and anxiety.

The best thing is, that they can be done at any time of the day. They're portable power that you invent, and can take with you anywhere you like.

WHEN SHOULD YOU SAY YOUR AFFIRMATIONS?

I believe that the best time of the day to do them is in the morning. You know the saying, start as you mean to go on, well, it's about creating an intention early on in your day. In the morning, when you are still a bit groggy, but with a day's energy ahead of you, your affirmations can begin to act like the strongest shot of espresso coffee you've ever had, and a reference point to influence your entire day.

Of course, say them anytime you like, but the morning is usually easiest as well, as getting ready for work, school, or just your day in general, usually follows a systematic routine, and adding an extra minute or two, to that order, is a very natural addition. However, trying the alternative, of just attempting to remember to say them at any given time of the day, is usually a recipe for failure. Structure and routine, with minimal effort, are keys to building good habits.

ISN'T THIS JUST POSTIVE THINKING?

By the way, this isn't about thinking yourself happy. As coaching expert, Tony Robbins says, if you have a garden, and you keep telling yourself "there are no weeds, there are no weeds", then your garden is going to be overrun with weeds. So, just like your thoughts, if you keep telling yourself "I'm happy, I'm happy, I'm happy", you'll be lying to yourself.

Instead what he teaches us is that we need to go out into the garden and do daily weeding. If you don't attend to the weeds, which are the negative self-talk, then they will grow. Not noticeably at first but over time they'll get so big that you'll have to do so much work to undue them, but if you do a little maintenance every day, then gradually, over time, you will have a beautiful garden. This translates as, empowering thoughts, and all it will take is a moment or two of being your own biggest fan.

So again, I recommend doing these affirmations and practicing questions every morning. They will literally only take you 1 minute!

THINK OF AFFIRMATIONS AS SELF-PROPOGANDA

A great way to think of affirmations are as self-propaganda. That might seem like lying to yourself, but when you realise the powerful effect, you'll be hooked. The most famous example of empowering self-propaganda in popular culture is by Mohammad Ali, regarded by many as the greatest boxer of all time.

Would you believe it though that it wasn't the people, the fans, or the media, that gave Muhammad Ali this title, The Greatest of All Time, but Ali himself.

He would get himself so psyched up in the weeks, and months, leading up to the big fights, and he would do it by telling everyone that he was the greatest boxer of all time, and that he couldn't possibly lose. That he was sure to win. He would predict what round he'd knock out his opponents, and he was often right. He would even make rhymes and songs about his self-belief. He was absurdly cocky. He was arrogant. He believed in himself and he wouldn't be shut up.

Some people hated this self-belief. Just picture the audacity of a black man, in 60s America, telling everyone that he was so great. That he was so pretty. It was a time when black people there, were only just overcoming segregation laws. I can only speculate about a such a time, and a place that I'll never know, but to be so bold in the face of life's challenges is a lesson I love, and I hope you can take inspiration from his journey too, as I have.

Can you write your own propaganda speeches?

Can you sing songs about how pretty you are?

How about a poem celebrating your beautiful body?

Can you memorise it? Can you recite it?

BELIEVE

To believe in yourself

When the world says you have no right

Is to not give a fuck

And fight the good fight

CHAPTER 6

SELF-CARE

Self-care is so important when it comes to loving your body, and yet so often overlooked.

But first...

WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care, is any practice that is essential that you need, for you to feel you. To feel whole, nurtured, revitalised, in your skin, and free from excessive stress.

Stress can wreak havoc on our bodies, and make us vulnerable to a plethora of illnesses. If our body is so exposed to the hardships of life, without enough comforts to sooth us, then we can begin to feel like strangers in our own skin.

Feeling tired as an example, can definitely impact the quality of the rest of our day and things like our mood and our levels of concentration. Exercise is also pretty difficult if you're too tired, and you'll likely need more sugary food than normal to keep you going.

Caffeinated drinks are a staple go to for many, stuck in this sleep deprived cycle, which only causes your body to create a bigger energy debt, which means you might feel ok after a red bull, but you're now using up a kind of 'false energy', which you'll have to make up at some point, and you'll likely go to sleep later, or even just the quality of sleep may be effected, for the caffeine in your system.

You wake up and repeat the process. Your body, in this chaotic cycle, doesn't have a chance to fully rest and so you might feel a bit icky. You find that you take less care of yourself because you don't feel 100%, or anywhere near it, and so allow bad habits to creep in, in a kind of 'what-the-hell', fuck it, attitude!

So, like sleep, some self-care practices require daily attention, while other practices need topping up at less regular intervals.

Taking short weekend vacations might be an example of a less regular practice, but that is still consistent. I know for myself that I need at least one day a week surrounded by nature, just to refill my lungs with fresh air, and connect to the great outdoors.

HOW IS YOUR SELF-GROOMING?

Another great example of daily self-care is self-grooming. Many people wait to take care of their bodies, and buy nice clothes, and get a good haircut, etc, and feel pretty/handsome, when their body finally complies with the absurd societal standards.

Naturally, it is impossible for most people to get the 'ideal' body that they feel they 'should' have, and so some people are experiencing as much as decades of poor self-care, believing that they're not worthy of pampering themselves, until they lose weight.

Waiting to lose weight before you can live is not healthy. This can be things like not going to go to the beach, and missing the feeling of the sun on your naked legs, or not allowing yourself to open up to romantic opportunities, or even postponing the opportunity to wear that outfit that you've been desperate to put on for years.

These situations all present their own unique hurdles, and are not necessarily resolved overnight. You have to go at the pace that's kind to your unique experience, but waiting can also be torturous. Can you challenge yourself to begin doing things like dressing your body for life NOW?

THIS LIFE IS NOT A REHEARSAL!

This life is the live show, and everyday that you are not being yourself, and treating yourself, you are putting yourself in the mindset of living in the tomorrow.

Here's a list of a few common self-care activities:

- Sleep
- Grooming
- Massages
- Exercise
- Vacation
- Time to spend on hobbies
- Time to spend with family and friends
- Alone time
- Meditation

That's just a small, common suggestion list, but you can add anything to it that you like. For example, if you feel overwhelmed with your day to day life, then self-care for you, might look like time with a therapist. Or perhaps getting a babysitter once a week to look after the kids so you can take some 'you time', or couples time, or whatever.

Of course, self-care is not always a reality for some. Some people won't have the resources for such luxuries. Even sleep, for a parent, might just not be practical.

THE ULTIMATE SELF-CARE IS SELF-COMPASSION

People are just doing their best with what they've got. You're doing your best. The trick is to use your unlimited resource of compassion for yourself, and your own unique situation. By that I mean be kind. Remember that you're not a super hero, and that getting stressed over not being able to care for yourself, will only make you more stressed!

It might therefore seem like a catch 22, but there is a solution, I promise.

PICK SOMETHING SMALL

For me, I find it most helpful to make a list of all the things I need to feel revitalised, and ready to conquer the day, the week, and the month.

I then pick just one thing from that list that is tiny. Something that won't cost me too much energy, and that I can work on consistently. Even if it doesn't make a huge impact, I start with something small.

Why?

Well because small habits gain the most momentum. Just imagine rolling a snowball down a slope. Of course, over time, it will gain more and more momentum, getting bigger and bigger, and the effort required to push it will be minimal, because you have gathered that momentum. But now, imagine on the other hand, pushing a ready-made, giant snowball, the same size as you! You may be able to overcome the inertia, and budge it a little, but you will move so slowly, and it will be such hard work that you will likely give up before you've noticed any significant enough benefits to offset the huge effort required.

So start small is my tip.

That might just be something as mundane as making your hair look good before you leave the house if you're not in the habit, or perhaps if you always use your smart phone or electrical devices before bed, you could experiment with switching them off a half hour before you sleep, and reading a book instead. You could even have a camomile tea to accompany your good book, or how about a playlist of music to wake up to in the morning?

Make it smaller even if you need to. Whatever works for you. Just remember, that your body is amazing, but it's pretty hard to find the energy, or desire, for any of us to love ourselves, when we don't take care of ourselves. The practice has to start now.

SAY YES, TO YOU TIME!

MY FAVOURITE PAIR OF JEANS

Those jeans

Those jeans

What wouldn't I give

To fit into them and finally live

That bikini

That bikini

What wouldn't I give

To fit into it and finally live

That food

That food

What I wouldn't give

To eat what I love and finally live

This life this life

Is painful to live

How much do I gain when all I do is give

CHAPTER 7

MOVEMENT/EXERCISE

Exercise has numerous health benefits, but I'm not here to sell you on what is already out there on every fitness article.

We get it!

It's good for you!

What I want to share with you is how it can help you to love your body, and I believe that I have some very compelling reasons, for it being a perfect tool for your body love journey.

EXERCISE GIVES YOU PERMISSION

Exercise, like dancing, yoga, boxing, and football, as some example, all have something in common. They all require us to move in less than typical ways than we usually would in our day to day living. They give us permission to be expressive, be it explosive, endurance, gentle, moving with structure, or fluid interpretation, or whatever.

As long as we aren't exercising for punishment, then I believe that exercise is a great way to define our liberal movements.

To exercise is to be curious like a child. Curious of the space you occupy and how you can enjoy moving through it.

Many of us spend our days, not only hunched over our computer screens, and phones, but also holding in our breathes, sucking in our bellies, shrinking our bodies with poor posture, and in general wishing parts of ourselves smaller, which is having a direct dialogue with our presence. Many of you are trying to hide in plain sight and take up as little space as possible for feeling body shame. For not feeling confident in your body and shying away in case somebody judges you.

ARE YOU TRYING TO HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT?

Exercise can therefore be a powerful declaration of presence, and assertiveness in owning your own space.

After all, when you're fully immersed in a physical activity, and loving it, you are at the same time heaving, and panting, and sweating, like a magnificent beast. This is important because in this time, you are so engaged that you allow yourself to relax. Allowed to express your

power, and just breathe deep, primal breaths. Breathe heavily, and surrender, and let the motions that guide all animals through their natural rhythms, and instincts, guide you.

In that moment, you are returned to your body, and allowed a time out from the neat, little, contained version of yourself that day to day living demands.

Through exercise, you'll also often find yourself engaging in competitive activities, or setting goals, and then achieving them. The act of setting and completing goals, no matter how small or large they are, sets off a sequence of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, triggering a natural high.

In these moments of triumph, a sort of primordial energy can take over you, as you feel connected to your most potent self: your physicality, and this sense of capability, naturally helps you to feel proud.

Other neurotransmitters that we commonly experience through exercise are the popularly known ones, endorphins and serotonin, which help with elevating our moods, and fighting depression.

EVEN STRETCHING WORKS WELL FOR CONNECTING TO YOUR BODY

As well as traditional exercise, even just stretching while standing or sitting, can be cat like and euphoric, as you breathe into that stretch that unlocks tension stored across the vaults of your body.

Feeling capable is not dependent on age by the way, and even disabilities don't have to stop you. Just check out The Special Olympics for inspiration on that front.

Whatever you do, try to find something you love, and be reminded that space is yours to occupy. You deserve all that you need, and exercise can help you to remember just that.

HOME SWEET HOME

This shell is my home said the crab

And though it may be bigger than most

A bit nobly in some directions

And cracked too much to boast

I still polish it each day

And sure sometimes I moan

But I carry it on my back with pride

Because this shell is my home

CHAPTER 8

LOVE YOUR BELLY

I like to play a game when I'm lying on the beach. It's where I see all the bodies walking past me, and I pretend that I have the superpower to help those who are sucking in their bellies to relax their stomachs and let a out a big sighing breath of relief. I know! It's a weird superpower!

But hey, many people suck in. Sooooo many people and it's pretty easy for me to tell when they're doing it.

How?

Well I used to be a chronic belly-sucker-inner. So much so in fact that at one point I couldn't do anything else but suck in. It was no longer intentional. It was a problem, and it was exacerbated by much of my time in the fitness world where I was always demonstrating and instructing clients to tense and brace their core and so I would inevitably perform the movement alongside them and forget to relax.

IT'S HARD NOT TO HOLD YOUR BREATH IN A SOCIETY THAT DEMONISES BELLY FAT

I've since done a lot of work on my own stomach sucking in and am still having to do daily breathing exercises and stretches to condition new good habits, but it makes me sad when I see people performing.

From that time when we used to just play there on the beach as kids, digging holes, burying each other, and creating memories, we now suck in for the judging audience that we walk past, lying on their loungers and towels, and the contrived pictures we take of ourselves frolicking just for Instagram and validation.

So let me share some cool info for you about bellies.

8 REASONS TO LOVE YOUR BELLY

1. **YOUR BELLY IS YOU!** It is not a separate thing. It is you and your body is an interconnected wonderbot of intelligence, and so talking shit about your belly means that it can hear all the bad things that you say about it... it can, I promise, and it has feelings too. Don't believe me? Well then check this out...
2. **YOUR BELLY HAS A BRAIN!** There is literally a second brain in your gut! Well, it doesn't look like the one in your head, but the enteric nervous system is considered

as the second brain of the human body and is a system that is highly complex, sending and receiving impulses, recording experiences, and responding to emotions. It contains more neurons than your spinal cord and has a direct influence on your brain in your head. It brings a whole new meaning to the phrases trust your gut and listen to your intuition. There's real intelligence in down there!

3. **IT CREATES SEROTONIN:** Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that is seen as a 'feel good hormone,' affecting things like our mood, appetite, digestion, sleep, helping combat depression and anxiety, and many other things. You might think this is all made in the brain but guess what? There is estimated to be around 90% of the body's serotonin made in the digestive tract! I mean, doesn't it feel strangely euphoric when you take in deep, calming breaths, relax your stomach, and slow down?
4. **IT'S WHERE BABIES ARE MADE:** Well for women at least! It's literally the home of another life for 9 months. Imagine the mind blowing feat of new life being created in this space. WOW.
5. **FAT IS A SURVIVAL MECHANISM:** Fat is an immediate sign that you are a successful human being when it comes to survival. In times gone past, your ancestors may have depended on that belly for their very life. It may not be what is in vogue right now, but for many of you, your ancestor's capacity to store fat may well be the reason for you being here today!
6. **IT KEEPS US HEALTHY:** Holding our stomach in restricts our breathing and oxygen supply. This state of chronic shallow breathing can increase tension in the body, lead to respiratory problems, and even lower your body's immunity, making you more susceptible to illnesses. Diaphragmatic breathing on the other hand, which is using your diaphragm muscle to breath from your belly, can help lower your blood pressure, decrease stress, reduce your heart rate, relax your muscles, and many other wonderful benefits, but not if you're sucking in all the time trying to perform.
7. **IT REPRESENTS OUR SEXUALITY:** For me it is my base. My centre. My core. And it is so rooted in my sexuality. I feel so charged in my masculine energy when I push my belly out and take up some good space. It's the ultimate act of confidence to put on display what others think is taboo and be comfortable doing it.
8. **IT IS THE THIRD CHAKRA:** The 7 chakras from spiritual teachings point to the belly as the home of the manipura, (the solar plexus chakra) located around the area of your naval and solar plexus, and is seen as the element of fire. It is considered as the chakra that allows you warmth, self-control, setting healthy boundaries, self-esteem, warmth, and courage. I like courage the most there because it takes bravery to own

your own space in today's culture. This leads into my final argument for pushing out those beautiful big bellies....

TAKE UP SPACE LIKE PABLO ESCOBAR

I watched the Netflix series *Narcos*, which dramatizes part of the life of the Colombian drug lord, Pablo Escobar's life, and for me, his characterisation, by the actor playing him, was freakin' awesome.

Why? Well, because Escobar was a man that seemed to be led by his belly. It was as though he pushed it out intentionally to grab more space and for the most notorious drug lord of all time who dominated the world's cocaine industry in his day, he definitely wanted to take up space. He wanted to be noticed.

It was just a series, so who knows how accurate to the real man it was, but I took inspiration from his presence. A presence that was defiant to any challenge and let's be honest, when you're a billionaire drug lord, who's gonna say anything bad about you within ear shot?

But you're not Pablo Escobar. You don't make people wet themselves when you walk past them...Or I don't know, do you?

But anyway, imagine then how much more powerful the image is of you strutting around like you are the king or queen of the world. In fact, the more people might criticise you, the more audacious and confident you appear if you can still strut your stuff, and push out that belly, in spite of their comments because the funny thing is, is that when you move with genuine confidence, people start to believe it.

Our culture says suck it in but I'm fucking tired of holding my breath. Let's push them out!

BELLY LOVE

My belly is me

No more and no less

But some poke fun at it

To leave me in distress

When someone laughs at my belly

They are laughing at me

When the culture says suck in

I am forced to shrink myself from being seen

My belly is a called a disease

That needs to be torched, melted, and burnt

Exercise myself healthy

That's the rhetoric I've learnt

But all the fat in my body

Is still uniquely me

No more and no less

And I demand to be seen

CHAPTER 9

PRACTICE GRATITUDE

Practicing gratitude is making a conscious effort, and even a discipline, of taking time to be thankful for something in life. When we apply that to our bodies and are grateful, we stop focusing on what our bodies are not and start celebrating what they offer right now.

Many religions use dedications of gratitude and prayer as cornerstones of their faith. A way to submit beyond our self-centeredness and connect to what is humble inside of us. Gratitude is so powerful because we're not asking for anything. We're not praying for anything to happen, or hoping something will happen but instead living fully in appreciating right now. It is the practice acknowledging our frailty and transience on the sea of life, and thanking whatever life-raft is keeping us afloat.

GRATITUDE ASKS FOR NOTHING IN RETURN

I believe that there is a wisdom to the practice of being grateful that many faiths and cultures of the world have recognised beyond time recorded, and not all limit themselves to just one source like a divine, gaseous old man who lives in the sky.

You can be thankful to anything. To mother-nature for providing the trees that offer shelter and fruit to nourish. Grateful to the seas for fish, and the earth for crops, and animals. To the animals for meat and clothing. To the rains for life. To friends for good times. To foes for lessons learnt. To your body which provides a home for you to experience this life and all of its wonders.

It can be easy to scoff at such things if you are not of a faith nor spiritual in belief, and in this time we live in of science and numbers, our culture demands quantitative data to be open to believing, so let's have a look at what the research shows are some of the benefits of saying just a few humble words of thanks:

AMAZING BENEFITS OF PRACTICING GRATITUDE:

- The neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine become activated. They are essentially your body's own drugs and they are responsible for making you feel happy and rewarded amongst many, many other things. That reward feeling is also important, because like any drug, it'll make you want more of them, but the difference is, that unlike recreational or pharmaceutical drugs you put into your body, when you practice gratitude you are creating these drugs yourself and the

more you are grateful, the stronger the habit will become and the easier it will be for you to literally feel high on life.

- Practicing gratitude also inclines us to see the positive in life. It therefore has a problem-solving benefit as you see fewer obstacles with more positive belief.
- When you feel good as a result of the high, and perceive fewer obstacles, you naturally smile. Smiling itself releases more neurotransmitters like our friends serotonin, dopamine and endorphins, and rewards us with bursts of euphoria and joy, which of course we want to feel again and again, and so we repeat the smiling process to continue it for longer.
- There can be a reduction in feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression.
- You can become more patient.
- Your sleep hygiene can be improved meaning the quality and the amount of sleep you actually get.
- It can help lower blood pressure.
- Self-esteem can be improved.
- It can even help your relationships, be they family, friends, colleagues or lovers, as your outlook on life naturally helps you to appreciate more joy, and it is noticed by the people close to you.
- It can help make you more generous as gratitude creates a feeling of wealth. It is a wealth that is beyond money in the aspects of life that really matter, and those who are wealthy can feel compelled to share their wealth.

COOL, RIGHT!

So there they are. 10 wonderful benefits to gratitude that are truly transformative, and I believe that they go on and on. It is a full body workout and the more you can practice it, the more amazing benefits you get.

So now you know some of the science and research behind it, what's stopping you from being grateful about your body?

VICTIM MENTALITY

Well to start with, you may be thinking that there is something wrong with your body. This thought pattern is in no short part down to cultural brainwashing that says anything other than skinny and lean is not acceptable and needs to be changed. This is the terribly narrow narrative of our society today, and it can put you into a victim mentality: The mindset that there is something wrong with you, or that you've been done wrong, and that there is no escape, so no sense in trying.

This mind set can become like a drug because it is rewarding to feel self-pity. It is an addictive habit to feel hopelessness and is a drama that is reinforced every day that you contemplate what you don't have, in a world that is telling you to change constantly.

You use language like. "So ugly." "I'm the wrong shape." "I'm not good enough."

These statements are not true.

THEY ARE CULTURAL LIES!

You need to know right now. Right this instant, that you are worthy of respect, love and all the rights of any human being. You are beautiful. It is our culture that is bigoted in so many ways towards the non-modelling population(most bodies), so trust me when I say, you are normal and you are the majority.

Of course, you might not believe what I just said as the cultural conditioning of telling you that you are inadequate has probably lasted your life-time, but acts of gratitude can dissolve self-hate in incredible ways.

CONSIDER THIS

Here's an exercise for you. I want you to contemplate all the people in the world, who, through whatever cause, are without a limb, as an example. And then look at your arm. Really look at it, or any other part of your body that you criticise regularly, and consider anything could happen to you today. God forbid, but you just don't know.

,What if this were the last day without your arms that you despise so much?

I bet if you lost an arm today you'd miss it. You'd cry, and scream, scratch the walls and give anything to have it back exactly as it is right now. You wouldn't be picky would you? You wouldn't say "Oh I'll only take it back if it can be without the fat."

No way!

You would climb mountains and pay obscene amounts of money to have back what you take for granted now. Only then would you appreciate what you have right now for free.

How about if you ever really suffered from starvation, and malnutrition, like the millions of people who don't have the same luxuries we do? Your belly wouldn't cause you quite the same anxiety I think.

I realise that no one's pain is your pain. I realise your journey is unique, and I don't say these things to scare you into appreciating what you have, like parents forcing their children to eat with the argument of the 'starving kids in Africa who don't have anything'.

No, I say them to emphasize how lucky so many of us are, and how our fixation on what we don't have, robs us of what we do have.

HOW TO GET STARTED

So how do you do get started? Let's start with some basic questions to give you some structure on how ou can begin your own gratitude practice:

WHAT DO YOU CALL IT?: Is it a prayer, an offering, a moment of gratitude? You choose what you call it.

WHO, OR WHAT IS IT TO?: Are you addressing your belly, your face, your hair, your feet, your wrinkles, your god, your divine within, the farmer who grew your food. You can choose, and you can change.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?: Well you could get down on your knees and put your hands together or you might stand, and rest your hand on your heart. You could jump up and down like an excited kid. Or walk in nature and offer a silent prayer. What about at the dinner table before your meal? Hey, it doesn't even need to be words. This is about language, but don't limit your experience. You could write in a journal. You might sing a song of gratitude every day or dance your gratitude when you wake up. What a way to connect with your body and thank it.

WHERE DO YOU DO IT?: I do recommend starting in a safe space where you no one else can see or hear you so that you feel completely safe, but honestly, sometimes life is so good that if you feel confident and comfortable enough to share it with others, than share it. Our habits of dieting talk are such strong social conventions, that when we celebrate ourselves around others, our defiance against being perfect can inspire something in them, and spark communities of richer conversation and growth.

WHEN DO YOU DO IT?: I believe, start as you mean to go on. Creating a daily practice first thing in the morning is my ritual and one that serves many. It creates a foundation and puts me in a more positive frame of mind throughout the day to do it again, and again.

Essentially, do it whenever you feel like it. These are all your choice.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU DO IT?: I like to stick to everyday. Consistency is king and self-accepting language doesn't just happen. By committing to a daily practice, you are planting seeds that if you will spend a little time nurturing every day, will grow into mightier oaks than you can imagine. That's because neural pathways in our brain are the highways of habit. Each new experience creates a new neural pathway. If you continue to have that same experience of using positive, empowering language, with enough frequency, then the neurons will travel over that same path of self-belief, becoming more and more familiar and engrained, and therefore more efficient and faster, and you will inevitably get stronger at appreciating how beautiful, and deserving you are, through your very own words.

WHAT CAN YOU SAY?:

Some examples might be:

- I'm grateful to you legs, because without you I couldn't walk and move on this wonderful planet.
- I'm so grateful for food because even though I overeat sometimes, I recognise that food has been a necessary support in my hard times.
- I am grateful for my body because it connects me to my ancestors and ethnic community.
- Or my favourite one I heard recently from my girlfriend is- I am so grateful for my big feet because they help me to leave a big footprint on the world!

YOU CAN BE GRATEFUL FOR ANYTHING!

Our focus here is body image but it doesn't just have to be about being grateful for that. You can add gratitude for your family, or a friend that has always got your back, or how blessed you are to wake up in a time when you have access to clean water, the right to vote, and whatever.

It's not an easy task to begin to be grateful. It's so much easier to stay a victim, and if for example, you force yourself to be grateful, but do it without sincerity, then you will tarnish it with your suffering, and it becomes another game you play to feel more self-pity. You become a martyr and say "look, I did it every day, but I'm so lost that even being grateful can't help me".

Willingness is always the key ingredient for the start of any journey. If you are willing to commit to this practice, and perhaps not take yourself so seriously, then I promise that you will get back more reward than I can explain to you, and I hope it will be a habit of a lifetime.

AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

I'm leaving says your left arm

I've had enough of your abuse

For you I'm too fat and useless

For you I am no use

You've kept me hidden and you're ashamed

But I've been your husband, been your wife

I've carried all your loads

And never complained in this life

But now you're crying that I'm gone

You're only sad when I'm not there

Well if you want to keep your right arm

Then I hope you convince it better that you care

THE END

I'm not very good at goodbyes!

I hope this book has been useful for you. If you would like to keep up to date with all of my work, then you can follow me at the following:

Instagram: @thefoodandbodycoach

Website: www.foodandbodycoach.com

Youtube: The Food and Body Coach

Facebook: The Food & Body Coach

I promise you from the bottom of my heart, that the journey to finding acceptance, and love, in your body, is one of the greatest you'll ever take in this life, and one that you'll never regret.

Good luck.

Sebastian, The Food & Body Coach.