

Health Beyond Appearance: Embracing Fitness at Any Size

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Body positivity has become quite the buzzword in today's culture, especially on social media. The term encourages people, particularly women, but also men, to embrace their bodies, no matter their shape or size.

But a quick scroll through social media reveals the term is often still associated with thinness, athleticism, and youth...which begs the question: what does it really mean to accept our bodies as they are?

In this post, we'll discuss how we can adopt a mindset that redefines health to be more than just appearance, one that prioritizes how we feel, what our bodies can do, and empowers us to truly age gracefully.

The Evolution of the Ideal Body

If history has taught us anything, it's that the "ideal body" is a moving target. As culture shifts, so do our perceptions of health and beauty.

Before the 1900s, "extra weight" was a good thing. It was a sign of health and even wealth, as it meant you could afford plenty of food. The ideal female body was often portrayed as full-figured and curvaceous [1], while the ideal male body was corpulent.

In fact, a 2017 *Business Insider* article referenced a men's club in Connecticut, founded in 1866, called the "Fat Man's Club." To join, men had to weigh at least 200 pounds. The idea became so popular that it spread across the United States, reflecting a cultural embrace of a fuller, more robust physique. [2]

As Western culture entered the 1900s, however, there was a shift toward thinner, slimmer physiques, something we continue to see held as the standard today. Hollywood, fashion, and the media often depict slimmer bodies as "ideal." [1,2]

But just because it's "ideal," doesn't mean it's healthy. Focusing only on appearance can be unhealthy, both physically and psychologically.

The Problem with Focusing on Thinness

The problem with focusing on thinness is that it's not a realistic standard. There are so many shapes and sizes; no one body can be like another. Striving to push our body to become something it's not can take a significant toll on our overall health.

As Dr. Sophie Whynacht writes in an article for *Psychology Today*:

“The desire to be thin can become all-consuming, affecting relationships, self-esteem, and even career choices. We may constantly feel like we're not good enough until we become thin (or thinner), which can lead to negative self-talk, unhealthy perfectionism, and a constant fear of failure. This toxic cycle of body shaming and comparison can be incredibly isolating and damaging.” [4]

More importantly, the human body naturally gains weight with age as metabolism slows. This is a natural process designed to protect our bodies.

According to the National Institute on Aging, “Being underweight...increases your chance of developing health problems. If you have a low BMI [body mass index], you may be more likely to develop medical problems such as osteoporosis and anemia, and it may be harder to recover from an illness or infection.”[3]

This is why it is so important to realize health isn't just about how we look; it's about how we feel and how well our bodies function.

3 Steps to Embrace Your Body and Your Fitness Journey

Being able to perform everyday activities like walking to your mailbox without needing to catch your breath or easily carrying groceries from your car to your kitchen, these are better gauges of your overall health than the number on the scale or the size of your waistline.

So what can you do to embrace your body and fitness journey? Begin with these three steps:

- **Start Small and Simple.** It's not about overnight body transformations or being able to fold into a pretzel. Start with one exercise you enjoy and do it for just five minutes a day. It doesn't have to be perfect. Just start.
- **Strive for Consistency.** As with most things, it becomes easier the more you do it. Start with a session a week or one a day. As you build your fitness habit, add on a little more when you're ready.

- **Shift Your Focus to How You Feel.** Walk, practice Pilates, do a few chair squats, the goal is to feel strong, energized, and accomplished. Be proud of yourself for incorporating movement in your day.

Conclusion

At Restoring Bodies, we believe in fitness for every body. It's not about keeping up with societal standards; it's about helping you feel great in *your* body and empowering you to continue doing the things you love with the people you love by your side.

If you need encouragement or support to build your fitness habit, come join us for a class. We'd love to have you!

References:

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