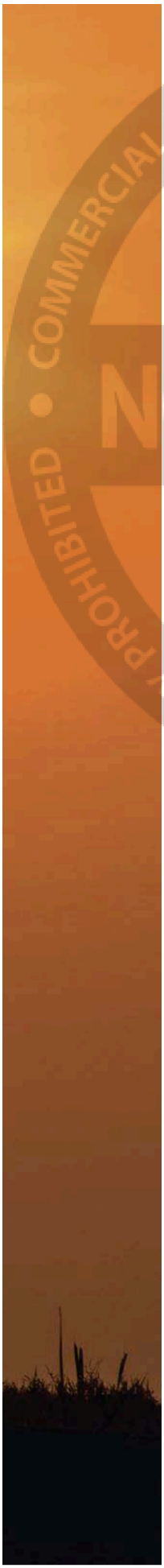
- Weight loss



Free form

Feel great about your body and happy in your own skin with psychologist Shahroo Izadi's guide to building body confidence – your secret weapon to achieving weight loss that lasts.

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Can you imagine feeling more comfortable in your body? Being happier in any clothes you want to wear – yes, even a swimsuit? Feeling okay to exercise in front of other people and good when you're dressed up for a night out? I promise it's possible. I've helped hundreds of women to feel better about their bodies – and I'd like to share how you can too.

I've discovered what stops most women from liking their bodies. To feel better about them, we think that we need to change them. We think we need to get fitter, eat better, lose weight or even have surgery. But what if I told you that you're going about this the wrong way around?

What I've learnt in more than a decade of working as a psychologist specialising in behavioural change is that the first step is to treat your body kindly. It's from that place that you can make any change you want. Changing habits is a lot easier when you feel strong, capable and deserving of care – both inside and out. You may be thinking, really? Because what I teach goes against what we've been told. But I'm living proof that it works. And it all started with my own experience of hating my body.

Fast fact

More than 73 per cent of midlife women aged 42–52 are dissatisfied with their weight.

SOURCE: EATING BEHAVIORS, 2024

Building better body image

I spent from the ages of 10 to 32 (I'm 39 now) trying (and failing) to lose weight. This is one of the most common things women tell me they would have to change before they can like themselves. But there's no end to the other criticisms I've heard – too fat or too thin, too tall or too short, too old, too saggy. "If I could just change my bum/legs/arms/stomach," they say. They've told me they hate themselves for giving up on plans to exercise or eat well, too.

Where did this self-criticism come from? Growing up, we all absorbed countless messages that shaped our beliefs. As a child, ads and magazines rarely showed women who looked like me using fancy beauty products, and movies didn't feature characters my size wearing outfits that looked stylish and fun. Does that ring true for you too? It sent the message that if we didn't look 'right', it wasn't worth investing in ourselves.

Even during the brief periods when I stuck to an extreme diet and reached a goal weight, I'd find something else that needed fixing. I'd suddenly worry about looking too old, for one. And days when I wasn't happy with my body or my weight were always bad days, no matter what else was going well.

After decades of dieting attempts, I was trapped in a cycle of either binge eating or starving myself. When I gained weight, I'd spiral; I'd let go of anything remotely resembling self-care – exercise, vegetables, drinking water, dressing up, even spending time with friends. It felt like nothing mattered because I didn't like what I saw in the mirror.

Then, when I started working in addiction treatment, I began to see a way out. I saw people battling their deepest, most ingrained habits and finding ways to overcome them. I started to understand how we can do the same with other habits and struggles. What I learnt surprised me: change didn't start with a strict plan or a new diet, but with kindness. ►

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The power of kindness

So, why does being kind to yourself work? You probably already know your goals. That might be to eat in a way that makes you feel better or to say yes to social plans even when you don't feel you look your best. It might be to walk more, drink more water or spend less time on social media.

Making any lasting change is about doing the hard thing over and over again until it becomes part of who you are. To do this, you need to feel worthy of staying on track. And the key to that is treating yourself with the same patience, compassion and common sense you'd give a friend.

When you're kind to yourself during a challenging moment, such as the urge to give up on a plan or fall back into body criticism, making an unkind choice will start to feel out of place. Eventually, this will help make it easier to stick with choices that support your confidence and wellbeing.

What's the result of my story? I have kept off the 50 kilos I lost, for seven years. But, more importantly, I know that it's natural for my weight to fluctuate and when this happens it doesn't affect how I feel about my body. I keep focusing on being kind to my body and taking care of it with my food choices. If you can practise self-kindness every day, you'll find you not only like your body more, but achieve your goals, too.

HOW TO PRACTISE SELF-KINDNESS

When these kind, self-supporting actions start to become part of your routine, you'll soon notice positive changes. Building your body confidence begins right here.

1 *List what your body can do*

Make a list of the ways your body has shown strength and resilience, the challenges it's helped you navigate and maybe even the decades it's spent supporting you. This will remind you of your body's worthiness of respect and care – regardless of how it looks. If you catch yourself criticising your body in any way, think of something on your list. You might think, "I hate my arms," and then add... "However, my body did give birth to my two wonderful children." Or, "My body did walk me up Mount Kilimanjaro."

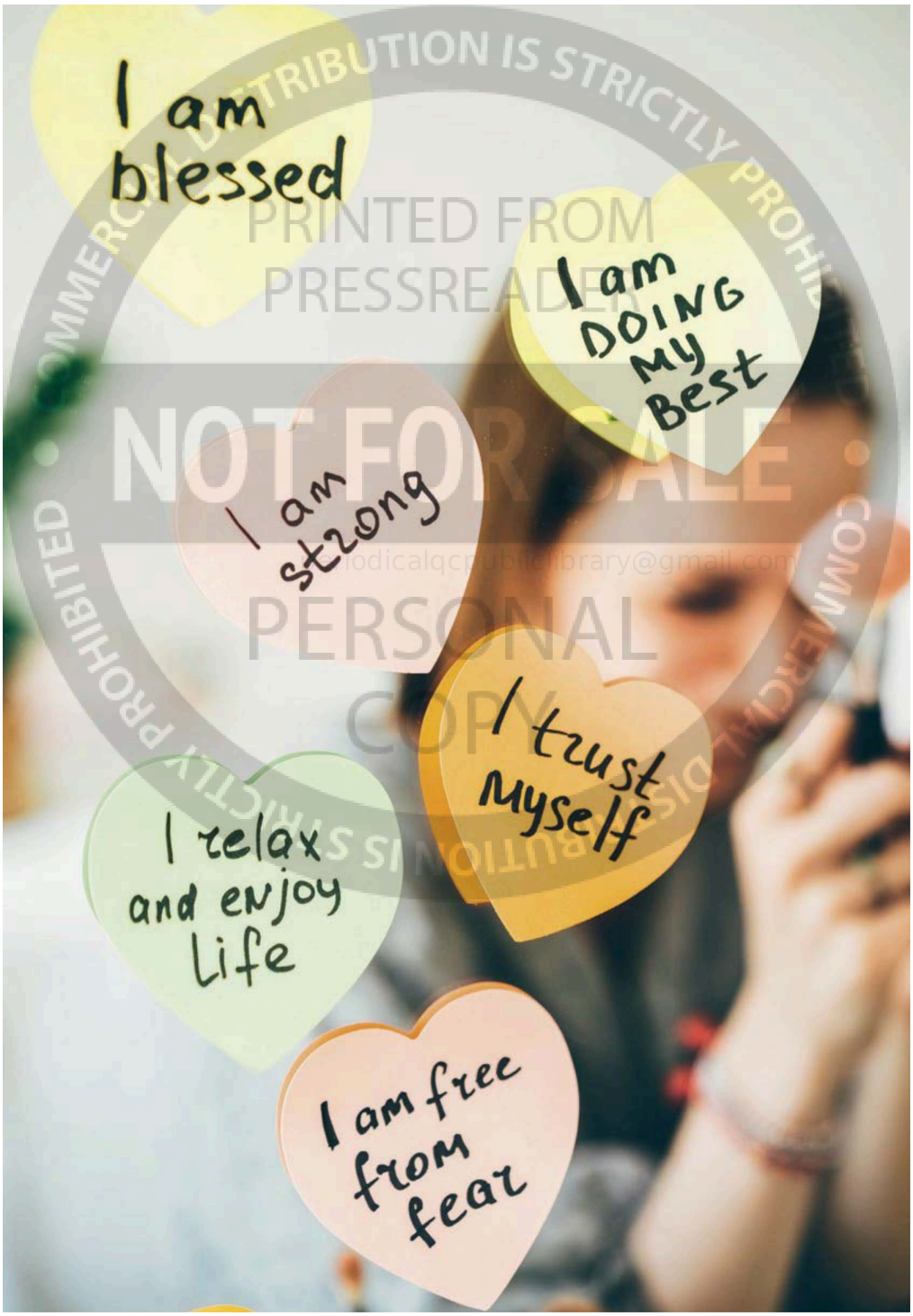
2 *Speak gently to yourself*

When you're working on building new habits, you might find yourself not doing what you intended to do. It's easy to fall into the trap of scolding yourself, thinking, "I can't do this."

Instead, talk to your body as if it's a child. Remind yourself that, like any child learning something new, there will be fears, struggles and doubts. You wouldn't criticise a child, remind them of past failures or tell them they're useless or incapable. You'd encourage them to focus on what's strong, not what's wrong. You'd offer sound, common-sense advice that moves them towards their goals. Do the same for your body. The next time you're tempted to throw in the towel, speak to yourself in a way that builds confidence.

3 *Envisage a new version of you*

Imagine waking up tomorrow as the person you've always wanted to be – the one who feels confident in her body, who can stick to plans, who likes herself and who treats her body with kindness, regardless of how it looks. Make a list of her routines, choices and behaviours. How does she talk to herself, carry herself, eat, drink and move? Does she feel better and more in control if she's done her hair? Or her make-up? If she's been for a walk? Or done the laundry? Two on my list are a healthy breakfast and a shower first thing. She might start her day without checking her phone, say no when she needs to or book herself a day out because she deserves it.



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

4 ***Write a letter to yourself***
Jot down why it's so important for you to look after yourself and to achieve your goals. Include what your life will look like when you do this. Set a reminder on your phone every few days to reread and think about your letter.

5 ***Repeat affirmations***
Say these positive statements in the morning or at any point in the day when you find things hard. "I knew it was going to be difficult; I do difficult things"; "I am capable and worthy of taking care of"; "Anything worth having is difficult to do"; "This will get easier, like everything else."

Do the little kindness challenge

Plan little acts of self-kindness into your day, to send yourself signals that your body and health matter. They'll also give you resilience for when you're tired, stressed or otherwise tested.

These kindnesses will be personal to you – maybe lighting a candle, spending time in nature, having a long bath, cuddling up with your furry friend, or stopping with a cup of your favourite tea.

How many of these nice things can you fit into your week? Put alerts on your phone to remind you to do these. You can get a friend to do this, too, and send pictures to each other. P

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