

BODY LOVE STORIES FROM FORMER HATERS



"I finally love my strong legs."
—Melanie Kann,
36, Queens, New York

"I always hated my big legs, refusing to wear shorts, even when it was 90 degrees. In 2006, I became an avid runner and lost 35 pounds. Everything shrank—except my legs—and I was as self-conscious as ever. It wasn't until I was tagged in a photo during a race that I saw my legs for what they are: two insanely strong powerhouses that have propelled me through 13 marathons and an ultramarathon."



"Posing nude helped me see the beauty in my curves." —Kathy Gruver,
44, Santa Barbara, California

"Years ago, I (insanely!) said yes to a photographer friend who asked if I would model for his art class. One woman pointed to where my waist met my hips on her drawing and said, 'Look at that curve; it is beautiful!' I let what she said sink in; if someone else could find beauty in the extremely curvy hips I had always hated, then I could, too. Now I view my body as a work of art and wear fitted dresses and jeans that show off my shape."



"I'm not afraid to eat dessert."
—Paige Arnoff-Fenn,
49, Cambridge, Massachusetts

"Right before my mother passed away four years ago, she said she wished she had eaten bread and butter and dessert. I realized that although her years of restriction kept her gorgeous and slim, they didn't make her happy. That opened my eyes and helped me make peace with food and my body. Now I cut myself slack: I enjoy ice cream and have learned to love the lines in my face. They show that I smile often!"

realized that my wide shoulders were powerful," she remembers. "That was a cool feeling." Even your workout at the gym can boost self-esteem. People who extended their normal routine for just a few minutes experienced a lift, according to Maher's study, which was published in *Health Psychology*. "The extra effort makes you feel competent, which can enhance self-confidence," she explains.

Take a yoga class.

Feeling better about your body can be as simple as shifting into downward dog. Women who practice yoga report higher satisfaction with their bodies compared with women who do aerobic exercise or none at all, according to a study in the *Journal of Eating Disorders*. "Yoga requires deep, steady breathing that promotes calm, relaxation and joy,"

says Timothy McCall, M.D., the author of *Yoga as Medicine*. In fact, research shows that the practice can reduce anxiety and depression and increase feel-good serotonin. Whether you're into a physically demanding ashtanga class or a more meditative one, focus on your own experience and less on the superhuman flexibility of the girl sitting to your right. Ask yourself: How does my breath feel as it comes out? What sensations do I notice in my hamstrings? Do I feel calmer? "The more you focus on your own body and the less you observe and compare yourself to people on the mats around you, the better your self-esteem," Dr. McCall says.

Blog to better body confidence.

Subpar self-esteem can come with a double-whammy of guilt. "Many women tell me, 'I feel bad about my

body, and then I feel bad that I feel this way,'" Mysko says. Using a blog as an outlet to share those feelings can actually build confidence—even more than writing down your thoughts in a journal, an Israeli study found. After 10 weeks, students who posted twice weekly showed greater improvement in self-esteem, especially if their blogs were open to comments. That's what Kaila Prins, a 27-year-old from San Jose, California, found when she started a blog two years ago to develop a healthier relationship with food and her body. "Women who were going through the same thing reached out to me, and I realized that I wasn't alone," she says. "Not only was writing cathartic, but also it was empowering and healing to feel like we're all on this journey together." Not sure where to start? Submit a post on thebodyimageproject.blogspot.com. ●



"ME, MYSELF AND I," BEYONCÉ

"FIREWORK," KATY PERRY

"BORN THIS WAY," LADY GAGA

"BEAUTIFUL," CHRISTINA AGUILERA

"DARK SIDE," KELLY CLARKSON