

My body houses who I am, and I've come to realize I haven't given it enough love or credit. So, here's the story of my journey with my body.

I grew up on a farm, and we rarely had bread for breakfast, maybe when my dad was home or during special guest visits. Even then, brown or wholemeal bread was usually a "healthier choice," right?

But high school was different. Breakfast became routine: water-ridden tea and four slices of dry white bread every single day. Now, pair that with adolescence, puberty, and the chaotic conversations of 1,000–2,000 girls all discovering their bodies at once. Rumors and unsolicited theories were flying everywhere.

One persistent rumor stuck with me: *wheat or yeast causes bloated bellies*. And oh, I was bloated, and I hated it. Wearing a skirt became a nightmare. I had never given much thought to my relationship with my body before that. Had I ever looked in the mirror and felt okay with what I saw? I don't think so.

You see, I have cerebral palsy that affects the right side of my body. I walk with a gait, and my right hand has a life of its own. I've always been self-conscious about walking, writing, and doing anything in front of people. So, when I heard the bloated belly theory, it hit me *hard*. I already didn't like bread, especially white bread, so I stopped eating breakfast altogether.

My friends loved it—they got my share and basically ate half a loaf each morning. Meanwhile, I told myself the bloating went down. But soon, the questions came: "Nyokabi, why don't you eat bread?" When "I just don't like it" stopped working, I said, "I'm allergic to yeast," and threw in something about it causing yeast infections. I didn't know a single thing about them—still not sure my classmates did either, but nobody questioned me.

This went on for two years. I was fine with it, or so I thought. I avoided mirrors, but I told myself I was achieving my goal: a flat tummy. I was happy when my sweater didn't bulge around my midsection. When I look at pictures from that time, I feel sad for that girl. But now, I extend grace, love, and patience to her.

Then came COVID-19. Everything paused. I was at home with my dad, and that's when my body changed. I blossomed into the beautiful woman I am now. But I wish she had been received with love. Instead, my dad told me to watch my weight, to be more like my stepsisters, and to avoid turning out like my mum. He told me to eat less because I was already "too big."

That conversation stuck with me. I thought of all the times I'd heard that kind of talk when it was about my mum or when my niece, barely two, was called fat. She was a chubby bundle of joy, but not everyone saw her that way.

I paused writing this for a week. Maybe I was triggered. Maybe I needed space. But I've been through all this, *and* I have a physical disability I was born with. Accepting that I'll always be

"different" hasn't been easy. I had to unlearn the idea that there's a "normal" I've failed to meet. I don't know any other version of myself; no one does and that's not a flaw.

There were days I wished I was someone else. Someone whose body didn't "fail" her. Someone with two fully functioning hands. Someone who didn't walk with a limp or attract pity. But then I realized... she's in me. I just had to let her out.

Confidence is powerful. When you radiate it, people feel it. Some are even intimidated by it, especially men, because many prefer the "damsel" type. But they'll have to look elsewhere.

Still, some things are hard. Like shaking hands. I'm left-handed, and my right hand, affected by cerebral palsy, doesn't cooperate. But the world is biased against the left. In some cultures, it's seen as disrespectful to shake with your left or even to give money with it. I say: it's just a hand. And it's my fully functioning one. If you won't shake it, then no greetings from me.

Last year, I began a journey of loving my body. It's had its hills and valleys, but I want to share the small things I do for myself.

Mirrors. I've learned to spend time in front of them not just to look, but to see. Sometimes, I talk to the reflection. I tell her how I feel. I learn how I feel *about* her. We rush to change our bodies before we've even built a relationship with them. Some of us don't even know what we hate; we've just absorbed the world's opinions and made them our own.

Try spending time with your skin. Don't rush after a shower. Drop the towel not for anyone else but for *you*. Airdry. Moisturize slowly. Take your time.

And above all, I've learned to love every part of my body, even the ones I once thought "embarrassed" me. **Especially those.**

However, this may look for you, please do it. Something I do is sit down with my body to collect feedback on how we are feeling and what's happening. It helps with my nerves and calms me down when I am overstimulated. Which happens a lot when you have cerebral palsy.

My Bio

I am Nyokabi, (she/her)a PWD cerebral palsy (right-sided congenital hemiplegia). I am currently an entrepreneurship student, and I love African history. I would love to pursue gender issues and women's studies because I have a passion for sexual and reproductive health education and their rights, and I feel that the degree will put me in a better position to advocate for SRHR. I love reading books (fiction) and sharing my opinion about them. That's why I write articles that are also a blend of reflections from my life. I love women, and they are amazing.