

## Body Image

In 20 years of working with thousands of women from all walks of life, all ages and all fitness levels, it's always amazed me that regardless of how fit and healthy, I can count on one hand the number of women who have walked into my office completely happy with how they feel, how they look and what kind of shape they're in. Tall, short, shapely or lean, busty or not, leggy or not, six pack or muffin top, apple, pear or banana, no matter how beautiful, how glowing, how happy with their life, women can always find something about their body that they'd like to change.

Personally, I always hated my thick legs and bubble butt. Although my mother told me growing up that "someday honey, you'll appreciate that butt of yours" I couldn't imagine what she meant. I played sports in high school, soccer through college, and ultimately the sport of adventure racing for many years. Needless to say, these were not sports that helped in my lifelong quest to have skinny legs and a derriere that didn't welcome calls of "Junk in the Trunk" from city street corners. Comparatively, my best friend since our first day in college always had the most beautifully long, lean dancer's legs in the world. I coveted those legs like nothing else. I didn't care that I had abs and shoulders popping out everywhere, even when she reminded me that she'd trade anything for my abs anytime... I just hated my "genetically gifted" lower body. Why did I care so much?

I certainly could have viewed my personal anatomy as "strong and athletic", which is definitely how I felt when I could beat a girl down the soccer field and save a goal, or portage a gear laden kayak over a hill to pass a team during a race, but none of that mattered when I wanted to go out on a Friday night and my pants didn't fit!

Any woman who loves the outdoors, loves to get her body moving, stretching and exploring, loves the beauty of nature and the spirit of being in touch with her physical self is an athlete. So why don't we always see ourselves as the athletes we truly are?

For me, it wasn't the four years of anatomy, physiology and biomechanics in college, the lifetime of playing sports, the countless journals filled with meals planned, calories counted, miles run, heart rates attained or body fat percentages checked. It wasn't the sessions with the psychologist winding through my psyche, questioning my innermost motivations and lifelong habits that got me over it all. It was far later in life, after the years of competition were over, after I had left my fast paced L.A. life. It was one simply beautiful weekend, camping at Waldo Lake in central Oregon. The couple we were vacationing with came equipped with canoes, kayaks, running shoes and bikes like we did and were equally motivated for a fun-filled athletic weekend. We planned a mountain bike ride around the lake, and since my girlfriend was new to the sport, we

let the guys go on ahead so there'd be no pressure to keep up. Completely unfamiliar with riding for the pure enjoyment of it, at a pace that allowed me to notice the depth and clarity of the lake, the changing color of the leaves around us, the pure quiet of the forest, I was having the time of my life. When we reached our halfway point, a breathtaking lookout where the guys were waiting for us, I blurted to my husband, "Honey! This is the most fun ride I've ever had!" He looked me straight in the eyes and sincerely but lovingly said, "Wow, you must finally be over yourself!" It dawned on me in that split second that YES! I must be, *finally*, OVER MYSELF! Life wasn't about red-zoning it all the time, trying to keep up the pace, having to be the best. These muscular legs! These strong glutes! They may be layered with a little fat, a few dimples and scars, but they've also motored me over, across and through the highest peaks, the most expansive oceans and deserts and thickest jungles in the world. They've carried me to countless countries, people and cultures so vastly different in shape and size, language, habits, rituals and beliefs. They've brought me enlightenment of my mind and soul every step of the way.

In that instant, I marveled at how many minutes of my life may have been wasted wondering if I could ever have skinny legs. Now don't get me wrong, there are still plenty of moments when I think that having a smaller butt would somehow, miraculously solve all of life's problems. But I also believe that every woman reaches a point in her life where she actually believes that she's as beautiful as she feels. Realistically, I know my body is plenty perfect through some eyes, and plenty imperfect through others, but because how we feel about ourselves is surely the most important thing, it's how I feel about it that counts. I haven't a client in all these years who can't balance out some flabby arms, a funny shaped nose, unmanageable hair or extra thick eyebrows with plenty of other body parts that they love, once they start looking.

For those who embrace themselves as the beauties they truly are at a young age, how lucky are you?! For those of us who may take many more years to figure it out, remember, it's never too late if you start right now.