

In EDA, we help each other learn and apply ideas about food, weight, and body image that initially seemed impossible. “Body acceptance” is one such idea. Many of us initially rejected the premise. We wanted to be a different size. Others embraced the concept only to find ourselves thwarted in our attempts to apply it in our daily lives. Whether you love the idea, regard it with ambivalence, or dread it, you are not alone.

Our ideas and beliefs about ourselves and our bodies begin at a very young age, as we learn and internalize socio-cultural standards that link values with physical appearance. Especially if at all insecure in our relationships, our self-worth may have been disproportionately dependent on body weight and shape. Success in other life domains (e.g. interpersonal relationships, school, family, hobbies, job performance) does not adequately compensate for lack of a solid and balanced sense of self.

We developed unhealthy patterns of thought and action because these worked better for us than healthier ideas did. We *trusted* our old ideas because they reliably brought us detachment and a measure of peace, calm, and power. It is self-affirming to insist on having things our way. We *trusted* self-affirming patterns though they hurt us and left us vulnerable.

Until we become comfortable with other ideas and actions, and learn to trust them to bring an equal or greater measure of peace, calm, power, and affirmation, we are going to have a hard time. In EDA, we find support in applying ideas that work better so we don’t need to rely on damaging old patterns to cope.

One of the areas that usually needs attention, regardless of our shape or size, is our relationship to our bodies.

Most of us regarded our bodies with suspicion, as if these incredible vehicles through which we see, hear, touch, think, move, and love, are somehow inherently untrustworthy. We feared that if we listened to our bodies, we would be overwhelmed by insatiable lusts or, conversely, feel nothing at all. We discovered that our bodies are sensitive, responsive, and indeed powerful, yet we need not fear them. Our bodies know and tell us what we need. Once basic needs are met, we can make sane and satisfying decisions that feel balanced and allow us to walk free.

Celebrating what is good and right about our bodies—exactly as they are—is a foundational idea in EDA that empowers us to move forward with life.

In EDA, we know food and weight were never the fundamental issues. Focusing on these was a distraction that kept us from addressing unhelpful, recurring thoughts that kept us stuck in old, unhealthy attitudes and actions. We work on changing underlying thoughts that prevent us from being the people we need to be for ourselves: trustworthy and reliable about taking care of basic needs so we can engage in life with dignity, integrity, and passion. Change takes time and patience.

Experiencing life without engaging in familiar old (damaging) patterns of thought and behavior is deeply uncomfortable at first. Recovery requires understanding the reasons for old patterns, finding answers that resonate and bring peace, and learning to rely on them.

As we work the Steps to find recovery, we begin to see that the unmanageable thoughts and feelings we tried suppress or deny are meaningful and helpful when brought into balance. Anger can focus us on addressing injustice. Fear can motivate us to be mindful of safety. Guilt can prompt us to make amends. Shame—feeling badly about things beyond our control—can sharpen our determination to change what we can. Pain helps us recognize when and where something needs to shift, and enables us to connect empathetically with others.

Bringing our pain out into the open so we can address underlying thinking takes great courage. All of us—agnostics, atheists, and believers—found it necessary to rely on ideas we initially distrusted to provide perspective and security before we were able to make much headway. With support from each other, we discovered that our own individual conceptions of God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose could provide enough calm to make a “good enough” start. As we learned to listen to ourselves with interest and compassion instead of judgment and fear, our trust grew. We found gratitude and respect for our minds and our bodies, regardless of how well we met our own or others’ initial expectations.

We work the Steps of EDA to gain perspective. Perspective allows us to create balance and live free of fear and self-recrimination. We maintain perspective through service: after taking care of our own basic needs, we turn our attention to how we can best use our time, talents, experiences, and energy to serve God, our Higher Power, or the greater good. As we do so, our gratitude at being able to connect to the world around us emotionally, socially, and physically—authentically as ourselves—increases. We find deep meaning and joy in the connections we discover and create in daily living.

### **What does it mean to accept our bodies?**

- Body acceptance does not have to mean loving how we look. Instead, it means focusing on celebrating and caring for our bodies, and living a meaningful life without worrying about how we look.
- We look in the mirror and accept what we see, respecting the history through which we have emerged into the present moment.
- We get comfortable with the idea that sustaining ourselves exactly as we are is a positive step.
- We recognize the desire to change our body size or shape as a possible diversion from focusing our attention on what really matters, and become willing to let go of distractions.
- We admit to ourselves that adopting a different perspective—one that requires us to take care of our basic needs so we can turn our attention to what matters to us in the long run—has started to provide the relief we were seeking all along.
- By reconnecting our minds with our bodies through meditation and movement, we realize we can trust our bodies to tell us what they need. We are happier when we do what is right for ourselves.
- We see that living life authentically as ourselves inspires others and gives us joy.

### **The doctor I saw for the flu told me to lose weight**

Prejudice against people on the basis of size is pervasive. Doctors, however, are more likely to offer advice on weight management because they are sincerely interested in our health than because of any personal or generalized antipathy. When offered unsolicited advice, we can accept the opportunity to advocate for ourselves and share ideas that might help other patients. We can affirm our commitment to maintain and improve our health since this is likely to be our doctor’s main concern. We can mention that a focus on weight increases stress and body image issues. We can discuss specific attitudes and actions that bring perspective and peace. Doctors are interested in outcomes. They are often receptive to hearing about practices that increase commitment to self-care.

### **How do we respond to fat-shaming statements?**

When a well-meaning friend or family member makes an unwelcome comment or suggestion, we try to maintain composure and a sense of humor. As with our doctors, we can use the opportunity to create awareness. If a comment is merely critical, we advocate for ourselves.

## **We linked size and appearance to acceptance**

Before recovery, we looked to others for validation when we could not provide it for ourselves. In recovery, we learn to take responsibility for our thoughts and actions: how we feel about ourselves is an outcome of what we think. What we think is our choice. In recovery, we accept and take care of basic needs as our first priority, then focus on using our skills, talents, and experience to be of service in whatever ways we can. As we do so, self-dissatisfaction gradually slips away. We are able to generate internal validation, grateful for opportunities to create, to be part of something greater than ourselves, and to be exactly who we are.

## **How do we address feeling uncomfortable with our bodies?**

The way we feel about our bodies reflects our own thinking as well as cultural and societal norms. When feeling dissatisfied with our bodies, we know we have lost perspective: our bodies are amazing and blameless. It is usually something else—unpreparedness to cope with a specific stress, or maybe a whole set of them—that requires our attention. If we are to be free of body image issues, we need to identify new ways of thinking and feeling that we can use at any point in our day. We take care of basics, pray, meditate, and turn to service as a solution. We consider what changes would restore balance. We know change takes time, so we work patiently to change the things we can. What we think and say to ourselves determines our perspective.

## **How do we develop commitment to treating our bodies with respect, kindness, and compassion?**

- We recognize dieting and weight focus are counter-productive, creating a deprivation mindset while increasing food phobias and stress.
- We understand that our bodies and our minds are inextricably linked, and that we have a unique opportunity to use them together to do things that perhaps no one else can do.
- We accept that we have basic physical, emotional, and spiritual/purpose-oriented needs, and that we alone are responsible for getting these needs met.
- We respect that until we are able to hear and validate ourselves, we are likely to seek external validation from others and through old patterns.
- We strive to trust and listen to our bodies without fear, judgment, or second-guessing—and develop deeper respect as we do so. Our bodies have more innate wisdom than our minds may appreciate.
- We understand restriction and rigidity as hallmarks of fear. We work to address our fears directly.

- We see that when we let go of fighting with our bodies, we make space for play, love, and joy.
- We cultivate gratitude for our bodies and all they do for us, claiming and embracing them as they are.

## **What does this look like in practice?**

- We recognize recovery takes time and effort.
- We work the Steps and adopt daily practices to create and maintain a calm and balanced perspective.
- We find patterns of problematic thinking. We find solutions to them that we trust, and apply them.
- We use meditation to help connect with our bodies.
- We focus on character-building activities. Service helps us develop patience with ourselves.
- We buy clothes that fit.
- We refuse to let numbers dictate our attitude.
- We eat real food and allow ourselves to enjoy it.
- We participate in body movement because it feels good. We can be strong in our bodies at any size.
- We ask for appropriate seating and other accommodations as needed.
- We advocate for ourselves and others like us.

## **EDA Members Describe Body Acceptance**

“When emotionally uncomfortable I sometimes still have negative feelings about my body, but now I listen. When angry, I find a safe outlet. When ashamed, I talk about it. I do the next right thing and my thinking gets better.”

“When I focus on basics and service, I get perspective. I have joy and gratitude I never had before.”

“Caring for myself properly enables me to be there for others without distraction. Amazed at how easy this is.”

“I was taught to ignore the body cues I was born with through diet culture and body-shaming. ‘ED’ distracts me from what is really going on and it feels easier to think, ‘I’ll lose weight and then I’ll be ok’ as opposed to feeling the broken feelings I have inside and healing them.”

“I am committed to caring for myself because this is how I practice bringing unconditional love to life. Real love is not conditional. When I struggle, but love myself through it, I learn what unconditional love looks and feels like, and I grow the most.”

“Most days I wake up grateful and eager to get going.”

“Working on being thin created a binge/restriction cycle that always hurt me and my body and never worked out for me in the long run. My body is so very happy that we together are redefining what recovery is, and my body has a voice today. I am learning how to hear and cherish that voice and myself in ways I did not realize we needed and deserved.”

# *Body Acceptance*



**For more information, please visit our website at:**

[www.4EDA.org](http://www.4EDA.org)

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