



Jodie, 36



Kelly, 33



Helen, 27



WHO HEARTS HER BODY?

Airbrushed gazelles in dental floss bikinis. Fifteen-year-olds posing in power suits. Celeb mums with six packs. It seems that the only real woman most of us see is in the mirror. And with unreality the new 'normal', it's no wonder we're freaked out by the hint of a fat cell or stretch mark. But beneath the din of diet talk and hints that we'd be better off with a boob job or Botox, a bold breed of woman is waging war on body hate. We speak to four powerful women about how they beat body issues to love the skin they're in.

Words: Pip Jarvis

Elise, 26

WE ALL



Elise Whitelaw, 26,
Size 10 (top), 12 (bottom)

“ I was never conscious of my body until a swimming carnival at high school. One of the girls pointed out her ‘huge’ thighs (which were tiny). From then on, I was conscious of my own body image and how it compared to everyone else.”

TURNING POINT In the lead-up to my wedding, everyone expected me to be on a big weight loss kick, but instead of focusing on ‘being a skinny bride’, I focused on being my healthiest self. I still had my curves the day I walked down the aisle – but I also had clear skin, an excited grin and an hourglass figure in my amazing dress!

I LOVE How well my body works. It gets me through each day without complaint!

I ACCEPT My cellulite-y bum.

IF FEELING NEGATIVE I remind myself that it’s what’s on the inside that counts – if my body is healthy, there’s no reason to be negative!

TODAY I’m more confident in myself and dressing for my body shape – I find clothes that are

flattering before worrying about how fashionable I might be.

MY LIFESTYLE I love to walk the dog every day – it’s our time to take an hour out of the day and spend it outside. I also do Power Plate workouts three times a week, which helps to tone up my trouble spots! My diet contains a lot of fresh foods and vegetables. However, I have a ridiculous weakness for chocolate and my willpower isn’t great!

I FEEL MY BEST When I’m wearing something I know accentuates my positive body bits and makes me look good.

WHEN SWIMSUIT SHOPPING I shop for my shape. An itty-bitty bikini is never going to look good on me. The resurgence of the one-piece swimsuit has been my saviour!

BEST BODY CONFIDENCE TIP ▶▶

When my sister-in-law was six, she was wisely told that our bodies, our battlescars, and our expressions are what ‘makes me, me’ and what ‘makes you, you’. Understand your body and what it is telling you – from how you feel to what you eat. Being healthy gives you the ability to come to terms with the fact that although you might not look like the photoshopped girls in the magazines, you still look amazing.



Helen Havryliv, 27,
Size 8–10

TURNING POINT I hate to say it, but I was binge-eating and forcing myself to vomit for over a year. My boyfriend at the time worked it out and he was really disappointed in me. That was when I made the choice to change my lifestyle rather than try to compensate for my bad habits.

I LOVE That I’m healthy inside and out.

I ACCEPT I can never get a flat belly!

TODAY I don’t look in the mirror if I’m in a negative headspace. I put on a loose dress and get on with the day. I know the more I wallow in my own negativity the worse I feel, so I have learnt (and it’s taken a long time!) to very quickly try to move on and keep up my healthy routine.

I don’t body-bash myself and I am much more confident in my naked body, which has other benefits!

MY LIFESTYLE I don’t go a day without some form of

BEST BODY CONFIDENCE TIP ▶▶

Work with your best assets. If you like your legs, wear short skirts! Remember, celebs get paid to look good, so it’s no wonder they don’t mind spending a fortune on PTs and starving themselves. Aim for health and make it your priority.

exercise. I don’t smash out a hardcore workout every day, but I move, and that kick-starts my positive attitude for the day. I study nutrition at uni, so I’d like to say I’m quite healthy!

I FEEL MY BEST When I step out of the house first thing in the morning! I’m glowing from my workout, and have a real spring in my step.

IF FEELING NEGATIVE I have a little whinge with my girlfriend, then we talk each other out of it.

“ Seeing pics of tall girls in swimwear with their flat stomachs used to make me feel a bit inadequate. Also, celebrity red carpet pics – I got the idea in my head that I should look like that when I’m dressed up, then when I’d see photos after an event I’d feel pretty down about my body.”

DO



Jodie Imam, 36,
Size 8

“ Between the ages of 16 and 21, despite being a size 8–10, I felt I had to lose weight – mostly due to the media. I tried lots of silly diets and ended up putting on weight. Because I was so obsessed with food and trying not to eat it, I ended up eating more, which led to me feeling worse and really affected my self-esteem.”

TURNING POINT My body image improved when I stopped worrying about the negatives and focused on the positives. I have learnt that, in life, striving for perfection will only make you miserable. When I moved in with my boyfriend I no longer worried about my body size.

I LOVE My naturally small size, my upper waist and my collarbone/décolletage.

I ACCEPT My mummy belly.

TODAY I remember that

the joy my boys bring me is far more important than tight abs. I am much happier and able to enjoy all the good things in life like my kids, husband and friends, yummy food and wine without too much guilt.

MY LIFESTYLE My main exercise is walking with the pram and chasing the boys, but I do try and swim once a week too, which is as much for my mind as it is for my body.

I FEEL MY BEST When I make an effort to dress up and do my hair and make-up.

BEST BODY CONFIDENCE TIP ►►

Even a little bit of exercise makes you feel more confident. Take small steps like a healthy breakfast or some exercise, which will make you feel more positive and in control generally, and which I find flows through to an overall positive attitude. Also, dressing for your body shape will make you feel a lot more confident.



Kelly Roberts, 33,
Size 12

TURNING POINT It's been a gradual shift over many years. I've done a lot of therapy (including studying counselling) and really getting to know and like myself.

I LOVE Being tall, my long legs, blonde hair, hands, feet, full lips and silky skin. I love the way my body feels.

I ACCEPT My tummy area has always been soft and, well, more cuddly than toned.

TODAY When a negative body thought arises, I'm usually able to catch it and check in with myself about what's really going on. As women, I think we tend to project our feelings about everything in our lives onto our bodies. 'Fat' is not a feeling, yet women often use the words 'I feel fat'. Really, 'I feel fat' might mean 'I feel sad', or lonely, or angry, or disconnected from life.

I wasted so much energy worrying about food, exercise and my body, so I've gained a lot of that energy back for living now! My man loves my figure and enjoys seeing me show it off.

MY LIFESTYLE I'm in recovery from a long-term

BEST BODY CONFIDENCE TIP ►►

Stop focusing on food and exercise; focus on how you can love and care for yourself. Stop focusing on how your body looks and listen to your body: what does it need? Be kind. It's hard to make lasting change without truly accepting where you're at.

illness, so right now less is more for me, doing just 30 minutes of yoga and walking a couple of times a week. Ironically, it's the least exercise I've ever done in my life, and yet I'm leaner than ever. My diet is pretty clean – I've learned I feel best when I eat this way.

I FEEL MY BEST When I'm taking really good care of myself – eating well, listening to my body, moving the way it wants to.

KEEPING POSITIVE I take good care of myself and try to nourish my body, mind and spirit daily. Positive body image goes hand-in-hand with self love.

“ From a young age, I felt my body wasn't good enough. I had a boyfriend tell me in my late teens that I'd look better if I lost weight, and I took that to heart for many years, trying crash diets and obsessing about everything I ate. I can see now that I definitely felt pressure as a result of the kinds of images we get bombarded with by the media. It seems that until recently (with the likes of Robyn Lawley) Australian media has only ever focused on one kind of body type as being beautiful.”



Despite what its name suggests, body image has less to do with what's in the mirror than what's in your head (walking lunges and 25-inch waists will not). We get the experts' views on why we hate our bodies, and how to fix it.

In short, body image is about how you feel, not how you look. So, the size 8 model sitting next to you could have the worst body image in the room. Or the best. According to The Butterfly Foundation education manager Danni Rowlands: "Body image is the perception we have of our physical self and, importantly, the feelings we experience as a result of that perception." In a nutshell, how we feel about our body and appearance.

If it sounds trickier than Facebook's new terms and conditions, it is.

"Though we see with our eyes, this information travels via the optic nerve to the occipital lobe at the back of the brain where we form it into image and interpret it," says dietitian and director of Eat Love Live Jo Gibson. "The optic nerve goes via the emotional centre of the brain, meaning that the image we see is contaminated in a sense by the thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves."

Among the myriad external contributors are a host of individual and environmental factors, according to Gibson, who says that body image starts developing long before we lay eyes on the likes of LiLo. "Our body image begins developing from a young age and can be influenced by internal personality styles, self confidence, self efficacy, happiness, coping skills and emotions," she says. This internal stuff mingles with external inputs including "comments from family, friends and strangers". Even well-intended observations can promote poor body image. Experts recently warned parents against praising physical characteristics, or even using terms of endearment hinting at physical traits, to prevent an association between pretty and worthy.

"It is how we perceive or interpret [comments] that is important," Gibson says. And while it's great to strive for better body image, don't expect perfection, Rowlands warns. "Feelings about our body are not static; it's normal for them to change."

OUR BODY IMAGE EXPERT PANEL

Dr Julie Malone, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, SELF.NET.AU

“Get to know your private body talk and start talking back! Private body talk consists of the thoughts and perceptions you have about yourself. This talk directly impacts your emotions. It can happen automatically without you realising, so once you notice this talk, you can start talking back with more healthy and realistic conversation.”

Danni Rowlands, EDUCATION MANAGER, THE BUTTERFLY FOUNDATION, THEBUTTERFLYFOUNDATION.ORG.AU

“Avoid making body comparisons to other women. Focus on what your body is, rather than what it isn't. Write a positive affirmation about you or your body and read it if you find yourself comparing.”

Julie Parker, COUNSELLOR, BEAUTIFUL YOU, BEAUTIFULYOUBYJULIE.COM

“Don't diet. All people who start restrictive diets do so from a place of self-hate, for example, 'I hate my body and have to do something about it'. Diets have a spectacular failure rate and often contribute to negative body image as a result. Instead, think about what you would eat and how you would exercise if you truly loved and respected yourself – something that diets do not match up to in any way.”

Claire Obeid, HOLISTIC HEALTH COACH & YOGA TEACHER, THEWELLNESSPROJECT.NET.AU

“Find a form of movement or exercise, such as yoga, that encourages strength, flexibility and grace. By building those three areas you will start to form a more positive image of yourself. Seeing the things your body is capable of – feeling strong, open, light – and feeling healthy because of this really does affect your body image for the better.”

Jo Gibson, DIETITIAN AND DIRECTOR OF EAT LOVE LIVE, EATLOVELIVE.COM.AU

“It's normal to have an 'ugly' or 'fat' day, but if the way you are feeling about the way you look is affecting your mood, social life, or ability to enjoy yourself, it is important to get help from a counsellor or psychologist.”

Other hot body image tips? »Swear off 'fat talk' with friends »Use positive affirmations »Dress for your shape »Avoid diets and excessive exercise »Focus on what you do like.



Taryn Brumfitt,
founder of the Body
Image Movement

THE BODY IMAGE ACTIVIST

Helping women to recognise and value real beauty from the inside out by facilitating positive body image activism

“I was inspired to start the Body Image Movement because I didn't want any other woman to go through what I had gone through in terms of a poor body image. I wanted other women to know that it's okay for our bodies to change (whether it be due to age or having children) and we don't have to turn to plastic surgery to get it 'fixed' to feel better about ourselves. My aim is to move as many women as possible from a place of body self loathing to a place of body confidence and body love. When we love our bodies we release ourselves from negative self talk and free up our head space to be more productive and meaningful in fulfilling and achieving our dreams and goals.”

Visit bodyimagemovement.com.au

MEET THE WOMEN HELPING OTHER WOMEN TO MAKE PEACE WITH THEIR BODIES.



Shareena Winter,
personal stylist and
founder of the 50 Days
of Fashion Challenge

THE BODY SHAPE OPTIMISER

Channelling her fashion styling skills into helping women to learn to love their bodies after weight loss

“I recently lost 30 kg and have started a project targeting people who have gone through body transformation, primarily weight loss, to help them to work with their new bodies.”

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