



**NATIONAL SERVICE SCHEME**  
**Sri Venkateswara College**

*presents*

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**BODY SHAMING: A Scar on Mental Health**



JULY 2020

# BODY SHAMING

## A Scar on Mental Health

*"You are so fat..."*

*"So thin... Skinny chap!"*

*"So much hair on your body. Get waxing done please! You look horrible!"*

*"Go to a gym. Build muscles. Be macho, man!"*

Do you get to hear anything of this sort? Anything that makes you question your body type/size? Any comments on your height, weight, body, appearance might make you feel humiliated and if so, you know then, you are being body shamed!

The sad part is, most of us buy them and curse our very own existence or try and bring about a change in the way we look, only to fit into the "beauty standards" set in by the society.

In the words of Rae Smith, "There is nothing wrong with your body, but there is a lot wrong with the messages which try to convince you otherwise".

Body Shaming is the sad reality of the modern world. It is known as the action or practice of expressing humiliation about another individual's body shape or size; a form of bullying that can result in severe emotional trauma, especially at a young age. Body shaming can be done by anyone- parents, siblings, friends, schoolmates or even social media. It mocks and stigmatizes its victims, tearing down self-respect and perpetuating the harmful idea that our unique physical appearances should be compared to air-brushed notions of 'perfection'. All genders may be subject to body shaming but as trends see it, women are more vulnerable.





# THE REAL PROBLEM

In a society surrounded by filtered pictures, videos and the social media that we idolize, body image concerns continue to be on the rise. 96% people worldwide want to change their body in some way which shows this is not an individual problem of low self-esteem but rather a collective disconnect with how we see our body-image. Girls and women are especially bombarded with images of so-called 'perfect' bodies. Failure to achieve perfect body standards can cause low self esteem, feelings of unworthiness, eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and can affect the mental and emotional well being of an individual by causing anxiety, or even depression. A person who struggles with an eating disorder is influenced by many different factors, including biological and environmental factors, and body shaming can be a part of that equation.



It's not that body shaming alone causes eating disorders, but it can amplify the thoughts. It triggers the same kinds of thoughts that are driving the eating disorder.

So many people across the planet are being anchored down by the negative and dark passenger inside their heads that says, "You are not good enough!" and it's hard to navigate life with this inner voice that is a result of noises from outside.



There is an established notion. They say, a thin, 'conventionally pretty' woman is what all women should strive for and that anything outside that realm isn't valued or worthy. To conform to the 'ideal shape of body' or what the society refers to as beautiful, is like choosing to spend your entire life being at war with your own body. Body Shaming or body loathing and image negativity is a universal problem that we are all dealing with. In this world where every 3 seconds a child is dying because of hunger, THAT is a tragedy, someone telling you you're fat is not, your bald patches are not, your stretch marks are not! The society which tries to fill all of us in a narrow mould built by its narrow mindset is the biggest misfortune we all are battling against day and night.

# WHY DO PEOPLE

## Body Shame?

People love to notice their environment. It is only natural to glance at what goes around—people, the building, the road etc. But it's not normal to draw a comparison with others' features referring to their physical attributes. Nowadays people, especially teenagers have been badly misconstrued with the idea of beauty. Being slim, fair and tall seems like the symbolic characteristics of a perfect person. Lacking such futile parameters makes them feel low about their own self. This negative outlook perpetuates in the form of shaming their own self, or of others as well. Body shaming can manifest in several ways. It could be brought into action by criticizing one's own self or by criticizing others in front of them or without them knowing. This is an innate conflict that seems to have a bitter expression. People are usually convinced with the opinions of others if it highlights some aspects or attributes that they do not possess. Whilst the other times, body shaming is targeted for fun. People like these usually pass judgements vaguely without realizing the impact it can cause on the beholder. They feel authoritative in doing so and mostly are motivated by the peers. As a matter of fact, this type of attitude is also motivated by the social stigma that is created by the people of the same community. What might commence as a normal mockery, can amplify exponentially to something harsh and can hit a person differently in all aspects inducing self-doubt and other dilemmas. It is also possible that one's outlook might change after an unhealthy social interaction where the young, imbecile children reflect their own ideas in a very childish way. Such children are usually mistaken with the idea of beauty and perfection. Social media also has a major contribution in cultivating such thoughts.

Lack of proper understanding shall only perpetuate this thought with a ripple effect. When people idolize other people, they incline to follow their values and opinions without putting much thought into it. If something is poorly manipulated, then it can cause confusion or induce an insecurity within the person and will also be poorly displayed as some aspect of the behavior that might make someone feel bad about themselves. The types of commercials that promote fitness, sometimes also highlight the aspects of a particular body frame and people start thinking if it's the only manifestation of an ideal body. Lack of interaction with the parents as well is a factor amplifying this concern. Without a proper understanding since the very beginning would only solidify this thought and would reflect in future. Another eminent effect as to why people body shame is due to lack of acceptance. We all are perfect in our own ways. We need not rely on the opinions of others rather our own self. The definition of beauty might vary in front of other people but to feel bad about it or making someone feel bad is a consent given by self. Every time you try to mould into someone else's picture of an ideal body, you are slipping away from your own confidence which is what you actually should reflect in the first place. This form of critical thinking takes time, but when one will imbibe it, the world and the environment around would start hitting differently.





# How does the **ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY** promote body shaming?

We have danced on the beats of a number of songs, whether in marriages or parties, we never really showed our concern for the lyrics. But it happened to us when we came across the word, Body Shaming, that the entertainment industry fitted just right into our “blame” bracket. We all know how hyper-sexualised music videos receive thousands of likes on social media. It is important to note the popular culture of promoting such music by hitting the like button and letting such songs top the music charts is what fosters the problem of body shaming. Also, the many awards received by such artists whose lyrics aren't paid much attention about. Why is it that the female artists are shown either twerking, or dancing in a seductive way in the only item song of every movie. Are the women watching supposed to idealise the figure on the television and assume to please a guy only if she looks as much desiring and 'sexy' as the female artists are shown in those songs?

It is not the only instance where body shaming can be witnessed. Another one being the movies such as Bala (2019) or Ujda Chaman (2019), both of which based their stories on similar grounds of bald people. Sadly, it didn't seem to deliver a message which it intended to. The two movies did not seem to reflect a sensible humour and left the targeted audience rather much more humiliated and in disgust.

Well, Bollywood has a long history in fat-shaming women in films. All bollywood fans must be well aware about Tun Tun (Original name, Uma Devi Khatri), a fat woman who was cast in films only for comic scenes and was shamed ruthlessly.

In other movies like, Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (2001), Raj (Salman Khan) mistakes Priya's (Rani Mukerji) sister-in-law as the girl his family has chosen for him. He fat-shames her by calling her “chaar bachon ki maa”.

In Kal Ho Naa Ho (2003), Sweetu (Delnaaz Irani), was unabashedly shamed for wearing tight fitted dresses and going on dates. She was responded to by her friend Naina (Preity Zinta) who tells her that she will never be able to please a guy if she doesn't lose weight. If on the other side we take Dum Laga Ke Haisha (2015), which is a beautiful story about a plump girl, at no point mocks overweight people and rather encourages the importance of self love and acceptance.

The conclusion of the entire passage comes down to a simple message: embrace yourself more than you embrace the lead characters in films, for they might not always stand up to your expectations, when the filmmakers add their cynical sense of humour.





# HOW DO PEOPLE REACT TO BODY SHAMING?

## Case Studies



Body Shaming isn't a very "elite or glamorous phenomenon". It's crystallized in our reality and amongst people we know.



Take the case of Riya Dasgupta (Name Changed), she is a normal college student who has faced Body Shaming throughout her child and teen years: "As a child, I suffered from a few intestinal issues as a result of which I had a lot of scars and marks on my face when I reached class 2. My classmates used to look at me as if they were looking at a bin. They were afraid to touch me or sit with me due to the fear that I might infect them. Everyone cares about themselves first, right? As I grew up, I had to face the world with an inferiority complex. Meeting relatives meant being told to apply a lot of medicines and cosmetics with not even a minor effect. I felt that I had to live to please the world....a world which didn't even accept me".

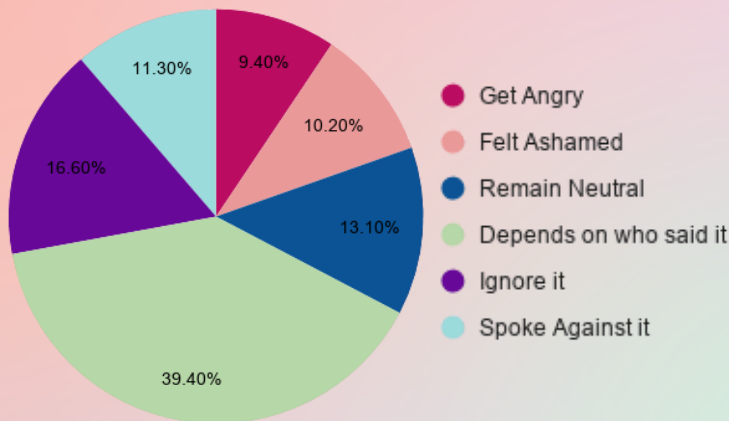
Body Shaming is not just something about women. It's a stigma and a problem that is too severe for males as well. For Shivam \*(Name Changed), it was a trauma of a reality: "I was a really lean and short guy. When I was a child, my parents thought I might gain some height as I grew. But it was a worthless hope. I still am short even though I've gained weight. Being a man means being tall and muscular. And till date, I try as much as I can to grow my height. I thought of taking steroids but couldn't gather the courage to. I've been gyming but that won't help my height, you know. And the worst part is, my family is afraid that I might not get a nice girl to marry just because of my height. Is it fair to judge someone through the scale of their height. Does that mean I have a short character or personality?"

"I was in eight standard and it was around lunch time that a few friends of mine approached me and asked to accompany them to the canteen. While we were on the way, I heard my best friend talking about my body proportions in a negative manner. She was telling my classmate that if I were slimmer and taller, I would have fetched double the attention at school. That day hence, up till 12th grade, I had major self esteem issues. I skipped eating meals at birthday parties, avoided every sort of junk food till I felt like I could be perfect. Eventually my psychology teacher who happens to be really close to me, made me realise how I was misguided with the idea of perfection. It took me some time to imbibe but now I am comfortable with what I am.

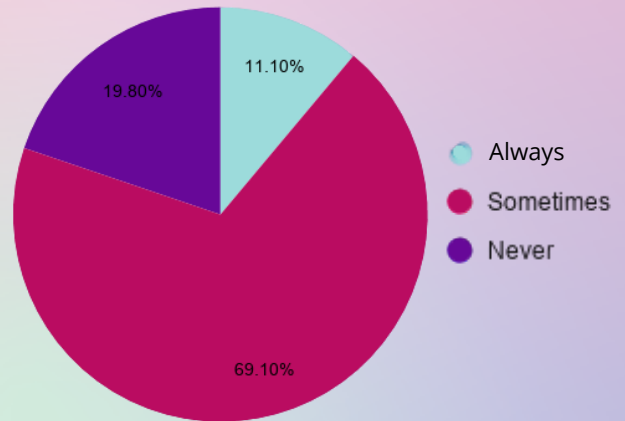




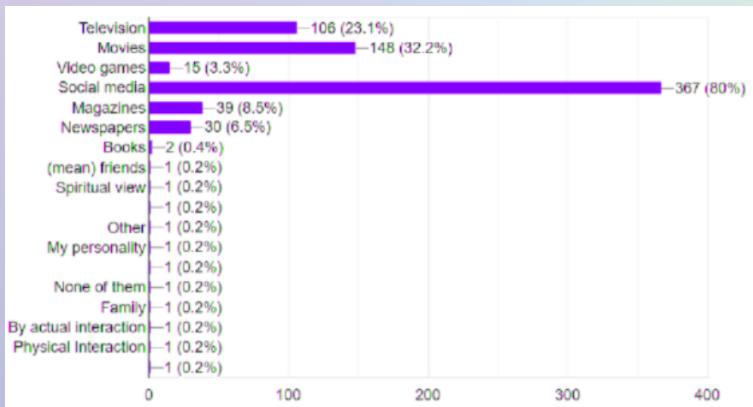
# SURVEY ANALYSIS



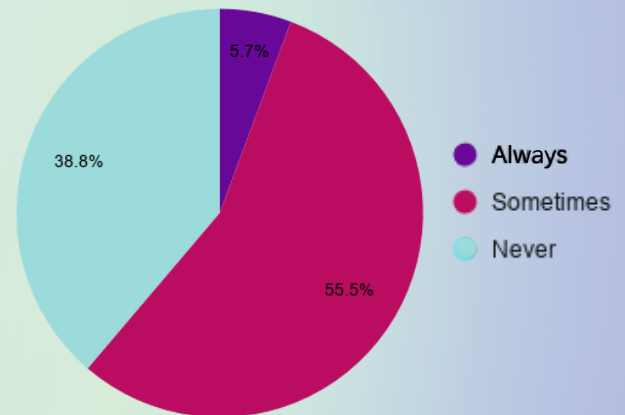
39.4% respondents stated that their reaction is entirely dependent upon the person from whom the comment came. 16.6% chose to ignore the remarks altogether whereas 13.1% decided to remain neutral. 11.3% respondents decided to stand up for themselves and spoke against it. 10.2% Felt ashamed and 9.4% were angry about the comments being made.



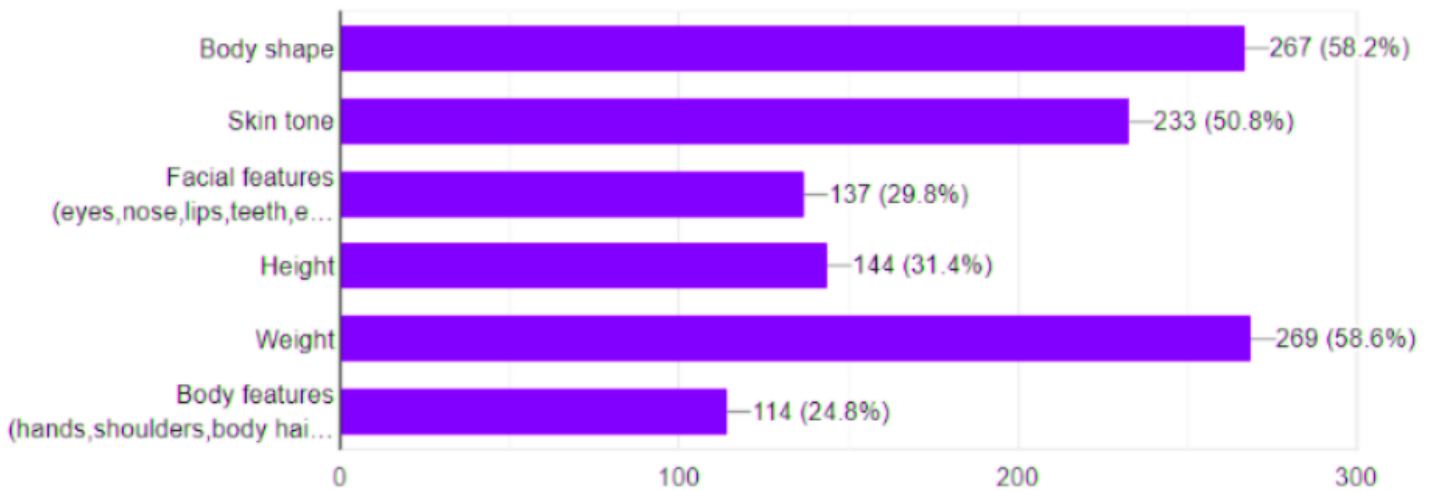
69.1% of individuals accepted that their appearance made them feel insecure sometimes. 19.8 % claimed that it never made them feel insecure meanwhile 11.1% of respondents stated that they have always felt insecure due to their appearance.



For the major percentage of our respondents social media, movies and television have the greatest impact on how they view themselves. For some individuals magazines, newspaper and video games were most impact while a small portion of people attributed other factors like books etc. as having the greatest impact.

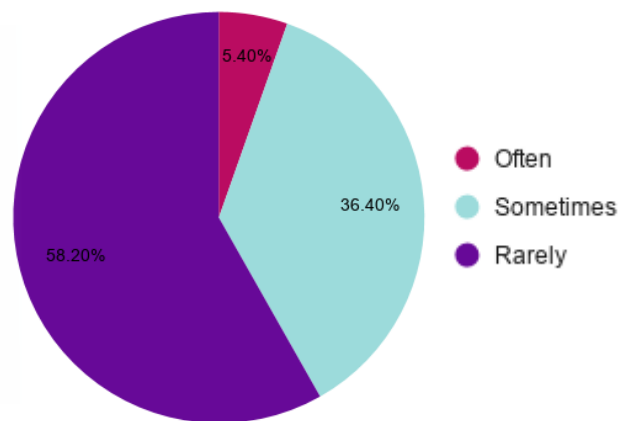


For 55.6% of individuals, spending more and more time frequently on social media, sometimes made them feel worse about the way they looked. 38.8% never felt this way whereas 5.7% always felt worse about their looks after spending time on social media.

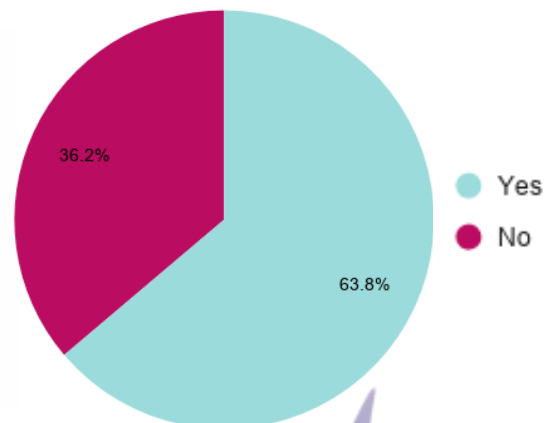


Major percentage of respondents believed body shape, weight and skin tone to be the most common factors that people are body shamed about. There were also individuals for whom the most common factors for body shaming were height, facial features and body features.

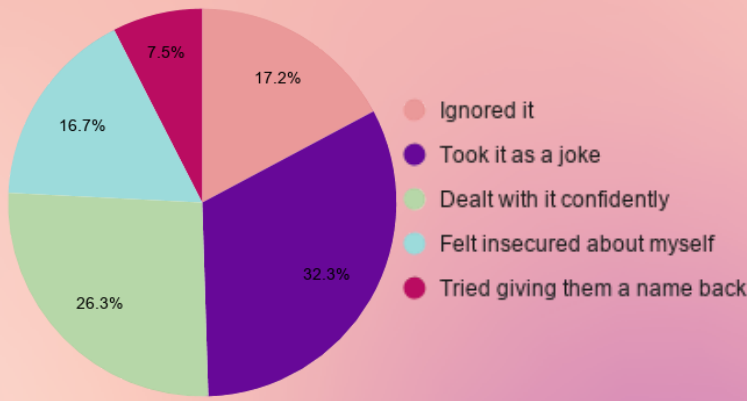
58.2% of respondents affirm that they rarely have been critical about others appearance while 36.4% claim that they sometimes knowingly or unknowingly judge people on the basis of exterior looks.



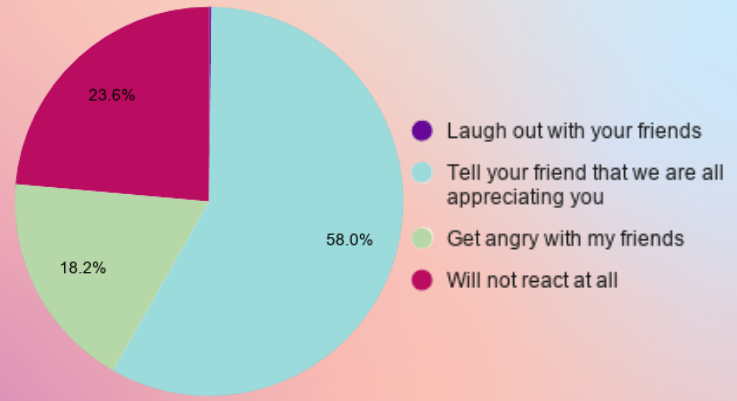
63.8% of people have accepted that they have been given nicknames based on their outer appearance.



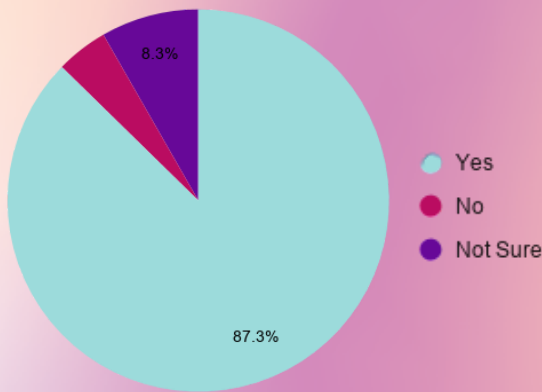




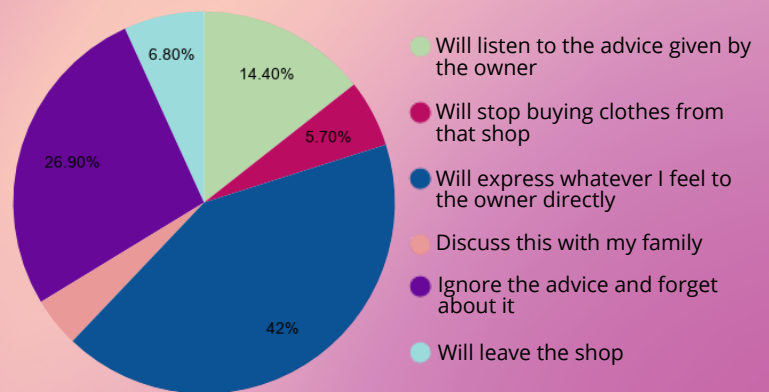
According to 32.3% respondents, they took critical remarks about themselves as a joke, 26.3% dealt with it confidently, 17.2% people completely ignored it, a smaller percentage of 16.7% felt insecure about themselves while 7.5% gave it back to critics.



57.1% people accepted that they will appreciate their friends for gymming and working on themselves. 23.2% will not react at all and 17.9% will get angry with their friends.



87.4% of individuals felt that the issue of body shaming should be addressed openly at schools, colleges. A negligible proportion thinks contrary.



42% people said that they will listen to the advice given by the owner. 26.9% feel that they would prefer to ignore the advice of shopkeeper and forget about it. 14.4% people think they will listen to advice of owner while 6.8% of people think to leave the place is the best they can do!

Out of the 459 responses received, the maximum responses are filled by youth in the age of 19 which accounts for 37.7%. The second highest response was filled by youth in the age of 20 which accounts for 24.6% followed by 22.7% including youth of age group 19. Around 5.7% of the total response came from age group 17. The least responses came from age group 21, 22 and 23. Females outnumbered the males in filling the responses making it 60.1% of the total response while males filled 39.7% of the total response. Also the other gender constituted 1%.

# HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM?

In our society, it's difficult to love your body without effort, and it can take many years of work to get there. There are many challenges to face before one feels compassion, acceptance, and ultimately love for their body. There is a societal body-shaming that is so ingrained that it can feel like the truth. But it's not the truth. You don't have to change your body to be deserving of showing it off how everybody else likes. The following tips will help you in your journey towards overcoming shameful feelings about your body:

## 1. Choose your messages on social media platforms

Intentionally surround yourself with messages that promote body-acceptance and self-love. Doing this gives you power over the influx of overt and covert messages coming at you. Follow body-positive Instagram feeds, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds.

## 2. Believe you can love your body

When you deny that you can feel better about yourself as you are and insist that none of the tips in this article can work for you, and therapy won't help either, and so on, you ensure that you're right. When you can recognize that you're condemning yourself to being stuck, you can start to have a choice as to whether or not you really want to be. Perhaps you don't want to condemn yourself to misery for the rest of your life. Perhaps you want to give yourself permission to see if you can feel better and begin the journey of figuring out how to make it happen. Believing in yourself is one way—perhaps the biggest way—to get out of your own way. Twitter feeds.

## 3. Create an inner-supporter

Once you're aware of your critical thoughts and how deeply you're harming yourself with them, you might want to stop doing this to yourself. One way to stop doing this is to create an inner-supportive part of yourself to step in when your inner-bully is trying to steal the show. Stand in front of the mirror and speak out loud what you want to believe about yourself. Use "I" statements. You might say something like, "I am beautiful," or "I am strong," or "I love myself as I am."

## 4. Practice thanking your body

It's hard to be grateful to your body when you're ashamed of it, and you wish it were different. However, there are always things about your body to be thankful for. Your body keeps you alive, your body carries you every day, and your body protects you in many ways. Your body has survived a lifetime of events so far. Think about what your body does for you, instead of what you wish it did for you. Practice taking time to thank your body for all that it does.

