

Done with Dieting Podcast #76: Body Neutrality



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With your Host
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When we think about body positivity or body love, I think we all have images where we are just going to be naked in front of the mirror and we're going to be like, "oh my God, my body is amazing." That all of a sudden, we're just going to want to run through fields of daisies, with unicorns, and rainbows, and life is going to be perfect.

And for so many of us, that just seems so out of the realm of possibility. Like, how do I even get there? Well, today on today's episode, what I want to introduce to you is something called body neutrality.

And when we talk about body neutrality, we're talking about how to move through body neutrality in order to get to body positivity. But for many of us, we may just hang out in body neutrality. Because it's actually a pretty comfortable place to live.

So, tune in and listen up.

You are listening to the done with dieting podcast. The podcast for women in midlife, who are done with dieting, but still want to lose weight and feel good in your clothes.

You know that diets don't work long term. But you feel like there's this secret that everyone else knows that you just haven't figured it out yet.

I am your host, Elizabeth Sherman. And I've helped hundreds of women get off the diet roller coaster, change their relationship with food, exercise, and their bodies.

Through this podcast, my goal is to help you too.

Welcome. Let's get started.

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Hey everyone, welcome to our episode today, episode number 76. I can't believe that I've done 76 episodes. This is incredible.

And today, we are tackling a really big topic, which is body neutrality, and body love, and body positivity. Now, unless you've been living under a rock, you've probably been hearing a lot about body positivity. And what I find for many of the women that I talk to is that we are of the age where we're like, "oh, body positivity is fantastic." For other people, right?

Like we think that everyone should love their body, but yet there's something in our heads that's like, "yeah, but that doesn't really apply to me." My body is the one body in this world that really should be different. We think that our bodies are shameful, but everyone else's body is perfectly fine. Like we don't have a problem with other people being overweight, or we're looking different, or having different needs than ours.

But once we have an injury or once we gain weight, "gosh, this freaking body, why can't this body do what it's supposed to do. I gave you a vegetable yesterday, why aren't you skinny? Right? We do that to ourselves.

What I want to do is I want to start out by talking about a few different definitions. So, what are all of these terms? You may feel familiar with them already, or you may have a little bit of confusion, like thinking that they're all kind of the same thing. And so, I want to start out with some terms.

And the terms are body image, body positive, and then what we want to really talk about today is what's called body neutrality. And so, when we think about body positive, we're really thinking about body image. How we look, how we appear to other people or to ourselves. How we look in the mirror.

Even though, we've been socialized to believe that our bodies are here as women, we are taught that we are supposed to be pleasing to the eye. We are supposed to attract the

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male gaze. That's where we prove our worth is in attracting the male gaze, being attractive. And what I want to suggest is that our bodies are used for so much more than just being pretty or being attractive.

And one of the very first things that I work with my clients on and the women in my group coaching program, the Feel Good Sisterhood, which just a little plug here, a waitlist is opening soon. So, I'm going to invite you to get on the wait list to learn more about that.

But one of the first concepts that I talk about the work that I do with my clients is the ability to start paying attention to how we feel, paying attention to living in our body. See, what happens I find with many of my clients is that we've been socialized to put so much pressure on how we appear.

And so therefore, when we're looking at ourselves, we're looking at ourselves from this critical point of view from the brain point of view. Instead of thinking about how we feel in our bodies. And so, for many of us, we find our bodies to be really super freaking inconvenient.

We find that our bodies are just kind of a nuisance, that we are all up in our heads all day long. We're overthinking problems, we have all of this self-doubt, we're worrying about other people's judgments. And what they're thinking about us and worrying about what's going to happen in the future. And then, fretting about what happened in the past and how that's going to come back to bite us and how we performed in the past and how we're not good enough.

All of this BS is going on in our brains. We're not paying attention to our body. And so, we walk around 24/7 just thinking about the past and the future. And we're not paying attention to what's happening in our body.

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And what happens then is when we have to go to the bathroom or we need a drink of water or we get hungry, we find it very inconvenient. We find it irritating and annoying and we're like, oh, my body needs something. Gosh, I don't want to deal with it. And sometimes we put off, what our body is trying to tell us.

And so, one of the very first things that I teach my clients is how to start paying attention to our body. And we do something called a body scan. And it's actually in a previous episode that I talked about how to start listening to your body. But this is actually a very crucial skill when we are on the road to body neutrality.

Because when we can start paying attention to how our body feels, and how the food that we give our body, how that feels in our body, how movement makes our body feel, how emotions feel in our body. Then, we can start to decipher it. We can start to learn to accept it. And we can start to really be on the road to body neutrality.

But too many of us focus on how we look, how we appear. Because we've been socialized to be concerned about that, right? And we think that because we don't look like we're supposed to or that our bodies should look, that our body is just wrong.

Now, the body positive movement really started from a very genuine place. It started as a place to bring more awareness to marginalized bodies. So, bodies that are black or brown, women who may have a mastectomy, women with different abilities, whether they have wheelchairs, or braces, or whatever. Because remember, and I'm sure that you are a part of this generation also.

When I was looking through Seventeen magazine, when I was a young adult. There weren't any bodies other than the blonde, white, thin image. Occasionally, they would throw a red head in there. But for the most part, all bodies that were represented in magazines were white, were thin, and were just this one way of looking.

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And so, even for myself, I didn't feel like I belonged and I'm so much closer to that ideal than other people are. But the fact of the matter is that we were all born a certain way. And so, instead of trying to get ourselves to conform to this beauty ideal, maybe it might be more inclusive, and it might create more acceptance in the world when we have more diversity.

In today's world, we do see a lot more diversity when it comes to bodies, color, and abilities, and shapes than we did way back in the seventies. However, we still have a long way to go because we don't see images in television or in magazines where people are wearing braces, or are different sizes, or have different abilities, right?

Until we don't really see a lot of that different diversity within our media. And so, the body positive movement really started from the place of all bodies deserve respect.

But the movement has really been kind of co-opted, right? And it's been co-opted because now we have organizations, we have companies, and corporations that are getting in on it. Like dove saying, you should love your body. And for so many women, our age, going from I hate my body to I love my body is way too much of a stretch.

And so, in episode number 24, I actually talk about this a little bit. Episode number 24 is called "why affirmations are BS?" And what I talk about in there is going through what are called thought ladders. And thought ladders, so that we can move away from I hate my body into a better body image.

So, if this is something that is interesting to you, I'm going to recommend that you go back and listen to episode number 24. But I am going to talk about that a little bit right now, which is on the way to body love is a place called body neutrality.

And body neutrality is really more about not thinking about your body at all. It's a space to observe without judgment or forced positivity. And for many of us, that might just be the destination. We don't necessarily have to go to body positive.

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Some of us are just like, "you know, what? Body neutrality is where it's at, I don't want to think about my body. I just want to appreciate my body for what it is, what it can do, and let's move on."

So many of us have grown up in a world where the female body is shameful. As women, we've been taught that we are too much. And also, that we're not enough, both at the same time, right? That you should dress sexy, but not too sexy.

We are here to exist to be pretty to other people, but yet if we put too much emphasis on our appearance, then we appear vain. And so, women are caught in this double standard all the time, too sexy, too big, too whatever. And we don't want to attract too much attention because then it becomes our fault if anything happens to us.

As far as body positivity goes and body love, it just becomes something else that we suck at. Like, we don't tell men that they should love their bodies. But yet, when I'm in the bathroom with my girlfriend and maybe I say something in the mirror like, "ugh, my hair, or my body, or I just feel gross." The common responses, "oh, you shouldn't feel that way, you should love your body."

And when I think to myself in that moment after I've just criticized myself, I love my body. The brain just turns off. That we cannot replace such a negative thought with something that's on the polar opposite.

Women have a list of SHOULDs. We need to be a doting daughter, right? We need to be just the perfect daughter to take care of our parent when they need us. We need to be a good and faithful wife. We need to be the star employee and not bring any of your home life into work. But yet, we should totally work when we're at home.

And motherhood, don't even get me started. Like, we could do a whole podcast and we probably will do multiple podcasts on mom guilt and how we're not doing that right. And then, friendship. Like, we have to be the perfect friend. We have to send the perfect

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gift when our friend is hurting, and we have to show up and be an amazing friend. And then, our houses have to be picture perfect as well.

It's just a freaking double edge sword all over the place. And body love is just another thing that we pile on top of our SHOULDs. Like, I should be grateful to my body and I just am not.

And so, we're told that we should love our bodies. Again, men aren't taught to do this. And it's just another thing that we use against ourselves. We're told that we should love ourselves, that we should love our bodies.

But then at the same time, we are marketed too that we aren't enough as is. The beauty industry is just tens of billions of dollars. The spa industry, fitness and diet, personal hygiene. These are all billion-dollar industries that are marketing to us and telling us that you're not good enough as you are. And that you really need to change, buy our product, do something differently. And then, you'll be okay.

And so, sometimes body positivity, body love, feels just so completely unattainable. For that end, what we want to do, maybe is shoot for body neutrality. So, where body positivity is about all bodies being beautiful. Body neutrality is really more focused on ourselves.

And how we're going to approach this is through the “think globally, act locally.” Okay. So, we've heard that slogan before when it comes to recycling. But what we're going to do is we're going to use that same slogan here in body positivity and body neutrality.

Because what we want to do is in order to really be more body positive in terms of the entire world, we really need to focus on ourselves. When we can release the judgment from ourselves, then what happens is we can release the judgment against others. And so, body neutrality becomes way more personal.

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What we really want to aim for is not necessarily, getting to body positivity. But maybe reducing the number of negative statements that we have in our head. So, body neutrality is really a space, where we can observe without judgment or forced positivity. It's shifting from appearance to what we can do, what our body is able to do.

And so, we focus on what our body can do as opposed to focusing on our appearance. When we think about body positivity, we think about, "oh my gosh, my body is amazing, or I should love my body despite being overweight." What we can focus on is my body works as intended despite being overweight. And it's really about accepting the body that you're in.

Now, some of you are probably thinking to yourself, but Elizabeth, if I don't care about the size of my body, then I'm just going to sit around and eat junk food all day. If I'm not mean to myself, if I don't beat myself up about my past transgressions of eating junk food or eating too much food. Then, what's going to happen is I'm just going to accept it and I'm just going to be out of control. And then, everyone's going to judge me.

But I want to offer that no one has ever loved themselves by shaming themselves. It just doesn't work that way. And when we shame ourselves, the last thing that we want to do is eat right, and exercise, and take care of our body. Because we find that our body is something shameful. When we think about shaming ourselves, then we're never going to take care of our bodies.

And so, we interpret body positivity as I don't care what size I am. And what I want to suggest is that's not it. It's about being able to accept where your body is right now and appreciating it for what it is. It's about having responsibility towards your body and not blaming or not putting fault on your body.

Because when we can accept where we are, it's not mutually exclusive, you can accept your body and still want to improve it. It's totally not mutually exclusive.

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And so, we think that, well, if I accept who I am, if I accept my body as I am, I'm just going to sit around and eat junk food all day. And I want to suggest that when we really love ourselves, that when we love the body that we're in and we want to take care of it, we're going to treat that body just like we would if we had a child.

You're not going to allow your child to sit around and eat junk food all day, or drink soda, and not have any water, or not have any vegetables. You know that that's not good for your child. And so, you would never do that to yourself if you really truly loved yourself.

And so, again, body neutrality might just be a little bit more attainable. The question becomes, well, how do I get there? How do I get to body neutrality? The first thing that I'm going to suggest that you do is you're going to write down all of your judgements about your body. So, write down all of the negative things.

And I know what you're thinking right now. You're like, I don't want to look at that list. That list is pretty terrible. But here's what I want to suggest, and this is true for all negative statements. You're already thinking it. And so, when we write it down, what it does is it gives your lower brain, your judgment's voice.

Once we have it out of our heads and on paper, then we can look at the list and we can see how mean we've been to ourselves. And we can start to change those thoughts. We can incrementally, start to begin to change them to something a little bit less negative.

Because again, we don't want to go to all the way to positive. We just want to get rid of all of those negative thoughts. And so, once you have your list down on paper, the next thing that you can do is you can start to question those beliefs and ask yourself, where did I get that belief from? Who taught me that?

And I think that it's really important to understand that again, women have been socialized to believe that our bodies are wrong. Our bodies are wrong for bleeding every

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month. Our bodies are wrong for going through menopause. Our bodies are wrong for having a motion and thinking differently for having different abilities and looking at situations differently than men do.

And our bodies are wrong because we have all of this industry that is telling us that we need to cover up our smells, we need to change our appearance. I mean, men don't use face tune on Instagram. Our hair, we need to tame our body hair. We need to shave it off, right? We need to laser it. And our size, that we should be ashamed of the size that we are.

And so, when we look at all of those messages that we've received over the years of your body is wrong, and this is why. We can look at those messages and we can decide if we want to reject them or not. Like, yeah, you get to decide, I don't want to believe that about my body anymore.

And then, the next piece to that is acting as if. And I don't want you to fake it into body love. But I might want to suggest that you act as if your body is neutral, get rid of the negative statements. You know what? This is just my body today and it's a fine body. It gets me from point A to point B.

And this is what my knees look like. I don't have to love what my knees look like today, but this is what they look like. And I can't change it right now, today. I might be able to change it in the future, but right now, I can't.

So, working as hard to accept and like your body and yourself as you have of hating yourself and your body. And then, I have one more question for you. And I love this question. If I loved myself, what would I do? If I actually liked my body, what would I be thinking right now? That's always available to you.

So, many people worry that fat acceptance and body positivity will breed disease, right? That body fat creates all of this disease. And I used to think that too. Like, that's part of

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my origin story, right? That I saw that I was overweight, and I started reading about how being overweight is a risk factor for lots of diseases including cancer.

But really those are correlative studies. Those aren't actually, causation studies. And what I've learned over the years is that a lot of those health beliefs are actually fat phobic. Meaning, that we've put way too much emphasis on body size as an indicator of health.

And so many of my clients come to me overweight, but their numbers are actually really good. We don't know that being overweight actually is a risk factor for disease. It's possible that the lifestyle factors that we do, that we have, that lead to being overweight are the lifestyle factors that also lead to the disease. Do you understand the difference?

So, it's not the body fat that's actually causing the problem, but the other things that we do. And so, many worry that fat acceptance will breed all of this disease. But again, this is a misplaced fat phobic concern. It's like, oh, I'm concerned about you because you're so fat.

But the thing is that we don't do that to people who are underweight, right? We don't do that to thin people who have eating disorders because they look healthy or what we think they look like healthy.

And to reiterate, shaming people into being a smaller size will never ever work. It hasn't worked so far. And so, if we continue to do it, it's not going to continue to work. Like, what would happen if we actually accepted ourselves? Shame will never produce our intended effect. And so, shaming others as well as ourselves, will never get us to a smaller body size.

So, a few takeaways from today. First of all, body neutrality is way more than how we look. Although, it could also be part of it. But it's also about being friends with your body. Really, having your own body's back, so to speak. And what I mean by that is

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when I think about my body, she is my ride or die. I don't get another one of her. So, I am going to do everything I can to take care of her.

Body neutrality is about being comfortable in your body and having her back and not disparaging her for not conforming to societal standards of how she supposed to look. Body positivity and body neutrality is possible for you. And if hating our bodies is a learned experience, we know that, right? Because children are not born hating their bodies. We learn to hate our bodies.

So, if it's a learned experience, that means that we can learn to unlearn it. We can unlearn our body hate as well. Loving the body that you're in and accepting it, is not in direct contrast with wanting to make it better.

I really want to focus on that because you can still accept and love your marriage but want to improve it. You can still accept and love your job, your career, your garden, and still want to make it better. And so, those same principles apply to your body as well.

Now, if this is something that you want to learn, of course, I'm going to invite you to work with me either through the Feel Good Sisterhood, which again is opening for enrollment and just a few weeks here or you can work with me one-on-one. This is available to you through coaching.

And so, the Feel Good Sisterhood is currently on wait list, we're going to be opening the doors in July and you can go to elizabethsherman.com/groupcoaching, I'll put the link in the show notes. And you can get on the wait list, or you can work with me privately.

And working with me privately, we would just have a call to see if we're matched up. And you can do that through going to elizabethsherman.com/private coaching. And that will allow you to set up an appointment with me and talk to me directly.

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Now, you might be thinking, "ah, body kindness, who needs that?" Well, but what if it actually is the solution. You've tried hating yourself into whatever size you are. Why not try being kind to yourself? You can always go back to hating yourself, right?

And so, that's all I have for you today. I hope y'all have a great week. I'll see you next time. Bye-bye

Hey, if you enjoy listening to this podcast, you have to come check out the Feel Good Sisterhood. It's my small group coaching program where we take all this material, and we apply it. We figure out what works for us, and we don't ever look at another diet ever again.

Join me over at elizabethsherman.com/groupcoaching. I'd love to have you join me in the Feel Good Sisterhood. See you there.