

Disordered Eating & Your Body Image 2



Body Avoidance

In our last session we discussed body checking and while some people who experience unhelpful thoughts about their body image may focus intensely and repeatedly on their bodies, others may avoid trying to look at their body altogether. It is common to swing between checking and avoidance.

If you hold negative beliefs about your body image, you may avoid certain situations which trigger them. Especially where your body is more exposed.

Have you ever avoided situations or events due to any body image concerns?

The problem with avoiding situations is that while it may help you feel calmer in the short term and more in control it can make body image issues worse in the long-term because:

We never get to test our fears! As you have been trialling us during these sessions testing your fears can help us learn more, often our fears are unfounded and keeping us stuck in an unhelpful situation!

Avoidance spreads! That is because it can make our anxiety spread and we start to lose confidence in more areas of your life for example you might be just avoiding going swimming because of swim costumes but then that turns to avoiding wearing summer clothes that might turn to not going out etc.

Life is full of opportunities and by avoiding we might miss out on positive experiences.

As much as we might want to avoid our body, it's impossible to do altogether. Our bodies are amazing, you may never truly like it but acceptance for what it does for us and working with it rather than trying to change it means we get more out of life!

Who can help?

To help overcome body avoidance you need to experiment with approaching situations that you avoid because of body image concerns, this technique is called exposure. We know that in the short-term exposure can increase your anxiety because you're testing your fears, but overtime your anxiety levels will drop and additionally you will learn coping skills to support you exposing yourself to challenging situations later in this book.

Firstly, to try exposure, you need to be aware of the situations which you are avoiding. Use chart below to help, or create your own. Once you have identified some situations then rate them between 1-10 on how anxiety producing these situations are.

Situations I avoid due to my body image concerns	My negative body prediction "What do i think would happen if i approached this situation"	Anxiety Rating (0-10)
Going to an exercise class	People will notice my body wobbling and laugh at me or call me fat	0
Looking in the mirror / window reflection		
Wearing swimwear at the beach / pool		
Shopping for clothes		
Wearing tight fitting clothes		
Wearing clothes that expose body parts		
Exercising		
Attending events with an increased focus on body		
Socialising with particular people or groups		
Close physical contact with others		
Self-care activities		
Being photographed		
Being recorded on video		
Posting images of myself on social media		
Eating in public		

Now that you have a list of avoided situations, use the next page to create an exposure exercise

Improving your self-esteem and body image

It is often hard to change the way we think about ourselves, but it may be easier to change the way we behave, we also may find it difficult to change things around us, but we can make changes to manage these things. Below are some strategies to try to help change the way you behave about your body concerns and self-esteem:

Positive self-talk

To do this we need to spot our negative self-talk. Such as

- putting yourself down
- comparing yourself to others
- being defensive and not taking constructive criticism very well.
- blaming yourself

We know how difficult it is to stop your brain from producing the negatives and unhelpful thoughts, what can help support using positive self-talk is using techniques previously explored in the core beliefs sessions. Firstly, in the table below lets think about the negative self-talk comments and how we may be able to respond positively to them.

Negative Talk	What Instead
I hate my legs. They are thick and chunky	<i>My legs are strong and carry me for miles</i>

It is hard to believe the positive self-talk to begin with, but if you can notice the negative and keep reminding yourself you are ok it will help you to slowly build yourself and others will notice!

Acting Confidently

Sometimes acting confidently even when we don't feel it can help us improve our self-esteem and body image

Write below some things that might indicate you are confident:

Looking at the things you do well:

Sometimes we forget we are ok at doing things. Reminding ourselves what we do well and what we are good at can help us build our self-esteem.

Note three things that you do well:

Building positive relationships

Surrounding yourself with people that build you up rather than criticising you. This doesn't mean cutting out constructive and helpful criticism but means not having abusive relationships.

Ask yourself some questions:

- 1: Are you happy with the relationship?
- 2: Is the person making positive statements about you?
- 3: Are they supportive and caring?
- 4: Do they make an effort to maintain the relationship?
- 5: Do they make you feel like a good and worthwhile person?

Top ten tips for improving body image

1. Exposure yourself to your body avoidance situations.
2. Know that avoiding the situation is only helpful in the short term and it will prolong your body fears.
3. Be positive about yourself and others!
4. Notice what you are doing well.
5. Fake it to make it!
6. Self-talk and coach your way through your body fears.
7. Experiment with your avoided tasks.
8. Try avoiding exposure activities more than once!
9. You may not love your body but by practicing acceptance it helps you feel more neutral.
10. Get further support if you feel body image concerns are taking over your life

Meal Structure & Review

Week Start	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
Meal 1							
Meal 2							
Meal 3							
Snack 1							
Snack 2							
Other Eating Episodes							
What went well?	Challenges:		My positive quote:				
Goal of the week:							

Emotional Food Diary

Example Food Diary

When? Date/Time	Who were you with? What were you doing?	What did you eat?	Triggers identified	Thoughts/feelings prior to eating	B/L/P	Thoughts after event?

My Week in Review

What went well with my eating behaviours this week:

Any behaviours which need my attention:

What I will focus on next week:



together we

Cumbria

Together We CIC

0808 196 1773

info@togetherwe.uk

www.togetherwe.uk