

Exercises to build your strength

Train your mind to enjoy your body. Five experts tell *Glenda Cooper* their methods

1

Compassionate brain training **Deanne Jade**

Eating disorders commonly develop around puberty as girls, in particular, struggle to come to terms with the changes taking place in their bodies, especially around the thighs, hips and abdomen. An exercise we use to help this is called 'compassionate brain training' – training yourself to look at your reflection in 'soft focus'. If you stare hard in the mirror, the body part you hate will look bigger because you're concentrating on it. So use your peripheral vision. Start by fixing your gaze on a spot above your head in the mirror. Then look to the left, and then to the right. By changing focus you can avoid that magnifying effect.

Deanne Jade is a psychologist and founder of the National Centre for Eating Disorders (eating-disorders.org.uk)

2

Breathing **Georgia Foster**

Training your mind to feel positive about yourself and your body takes just five minutes a day. When we are in self-loathing mode, we often shallow-breathe, which creates anxiety. A great way to break this emotional state is to take a long deep breath in, then hold it for five seconds then release that breath and count for five seconds. Repeat this three times. This process actively induces the release of endorphins, or 'feel-good' hormones, so you should start to feel calmer and you will instantly feel much more upbeat.

Georgia Foster is a clinical hypnotherapist, and author of 'The Stress Less Mind' (georgiafoster.com)

3

Self-imaging **Mary Wood**

Many women have a block about what their bodies can achieve. I use self-imaging to overcome this. Lie on the floor and focus on what the block is ('I can't sit in a yoga pose/dance because people will look at me'). Think what you would like your body to do. Fix on that mental image and the strength your body has. Then say a phrase such as 'I can experience the joy of dancing'. Do this daily, at a time when you can relax.

Mary West is a psychotherapist specialising in eating disorders (eatingproblems.org)

5

Yoga **Christine Harrison**

The condition of the spine is a key factor in our physical and psychological health. I recommend a simple but important yoga posture – tadasana, or mountain pose – to keep it healthy. Stand with feet hip-width apart, facing forward, with the weight right down the centre. Bend the knees, put one hand on the lower back and one on the belly. Lift the belly and the pelvic floor. Stretch into the arms, which move to your sides. Stretch the hands as wide as possible, then release. Press your shoulder blades into your back, widen them across and release them. Lift your chin parallel to the floor, soften the muscles of the face. Hold this steady and firm for at least a minute. Practise as much as you can.

Christine Harrison is the London regional officer for the British Wheel of Yoga (bwyo.org.uk)

4

Mindfulness

Dr Cecilia d'Felice

Identify one aspect of your body that you will celebrate today, nurturing it and showing it respect. For example, if it is your hands, treat them to a home manicure. If it is your hair, wash it with care, enjoying its colour, texture and fragrance. If it is your thighs, massage them with special oil, kneading them gently, and commit to walking as much as possible that day. By focusing on each part in turn you will begin to appreciate all that your body does for you, creating an understanding that each part is special and the whole even more so.

Dr Cecilia d'Felice is an NHS clinical psychologist, author and broadcaster (drceciliadfelice.com)