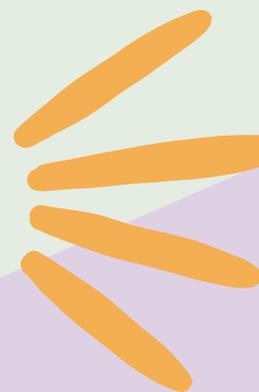


10 DAYS OF BODY KINDNESS



INTRO

With the new year, your social feed is probably filling up with diet ads (aka: wellness, reset, healthy habits, bootcamp – all of which are diets in disguise).

There is nothing wrong with wanting to look after ourselves – but the gigantic diet & beauty industry has a mega-hold on the way we view our bodies. The constant stream of messages enforces one beauty standard – and if we don't look like that, we're just not trying hard enough.

This keeps us on the (literal) treadmill of guilt and self-loathing, because – in fact – most of us cannot attain the 'ideal' body. And, why should we want to? All bodies are good and deserve our love and care.

That is why we're kicking off the year with '10 Days of Body Kindness' – where we can disrupt negative messages about our bodies, and learn to treat ourselves with grace and kindness.

With love, WM



**YOU ARE GOD'S
CREATION AND
GOD'S CREATION IS
GOOD**



DAY ONE

Have you noticed how normal it is to talk with friends about parts of your body you don't like? And how weird it would be to say, 'Actually, I love my body!' We have so normalised hate towards our own body, that we barely question it. Yet, when we speak against our bodies, we are speaking against God's creation.

At the crescendo of the creation story, God makes humans in his image: 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.' (Genesis 1:31). What right do we have to call 'bad' what God has called 'good'? We need to re-position ourselves as part of God's expansive and good creation.

And the wonder of creation is in its diversity – every tree, leaf and animal is different. Yet, we don't accept that diversity in ourselves. Let's learn to see our bodies as part of God's colourful palette, filled with unique life, hues and shapes. It is our diversity that makes us so breath-taking. There is not one type of beauty – there are literally millions of ways to be beautiful.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

Do some people-watching, and notice how many different body shapes and features can be attractive. Could we re-train ourselves to see diversity as attractive, rather than the one 'beauty ideal'?



**YOU TAKE CARE OF
WHAT YOU LOVE
- INCLUDING YOUR
BODY.**



DAY TWO

When we begin to dip our toe in the waters of body kindness, the first question most of us ask is: but if I accept myself as I am, will I let myself go?

It's not surprising, because all our lives we've been sold a lie that we are not good enough as we are. So, at some level, we believe not feeling good enough is what motivates us to restrict food, work hard and hold on to the fantasy of the ideal body. OR, we turn to food to numb ourselves from our own self-loathing.

But, how has that worked out for us?

The truth is we nurture and take care of the things we love. If we begin to take a more accepting and loving attitude towards our body, we will naturally care for and look after it – without the pressure of trying to live up to a beauty ideal.

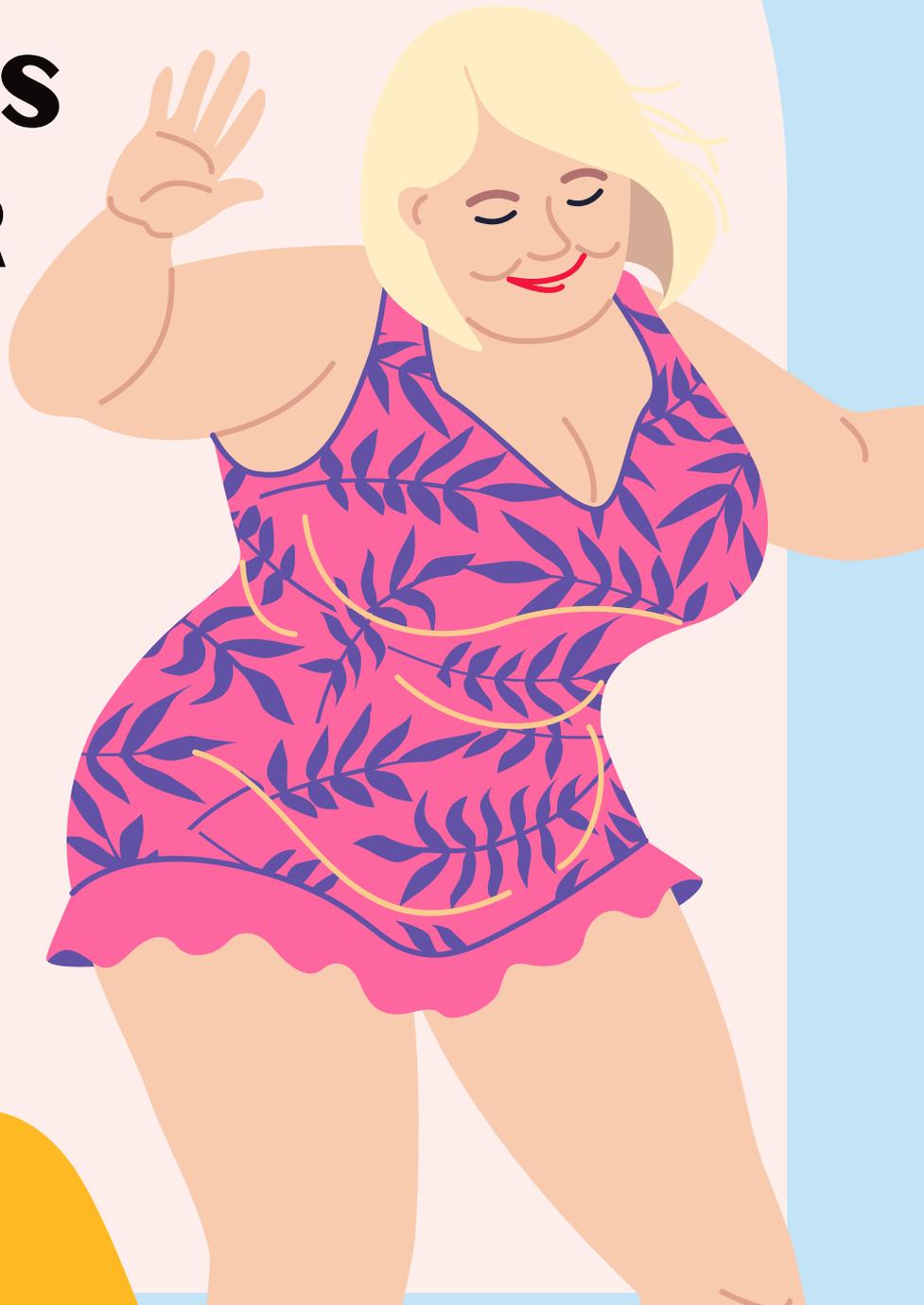
Have faith in your body. You've been taught your body is untrustworthy. But, actually, you can trust your body to tell you what it needs. For example, the simple question, 'Am I hungry?' is the best way to know whether it's time to eat or not.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

If you really decided to be loving towards your body, what would you do differently? Deep down you already know how to act with more acceptance towards yourself.



**SWIMMING
IS A RADICAL
ACT OF
KINDNESS
TO YOUR
BODY**



DAYTHREE

Your body deserves to feel the heat of the sun and the coolness of the water. But many of us have been robbed of this joy because diet culture taught us that our body is not good enough to be seen. Instead of celebrating all the wonderful things our bodies can do for us, we've been taught to hide our body.

Let's make a commitment to stop listening to this lie, and begin listening to God's loving voice, which calls us to freedom and fullness of life.

When the first Christians got tempted to go back to the rules of their culture, the leader Paul said: 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then.' (Galations 5:1)

It's difficult not to get pulled back to the idol of the body beautiful. But Christ calls us to freedom, through God's love and acceptance. This takes practise - it may mean feeling the fear and wearing the swimsuit anyway! Take a deep breath, give it a go, and when self-doubt creeps in, whisper to yourself, 'Freedom my girl, freedom'.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

What have you missed out on because you felt self-conscious? It could be swimming, wearing shorts, getting a massage, exercising ... or anything else. Give yourself the gift of doing that thing!



**IT'S NOT ABOUT
BEING A
'GODDESS', IT'S
ABOUT LOVING
YOURSELF AS
YOU ARE.**



DAYFOUR

You don't need to immediately fall in love with your body to practice body kindness. Looking in the mirror and saying, 'you're a goddess!' can feel false. Instead, try something that feels truthful – like, 'I choose to accept myself the way I am'. Then simply turn away and focus on something else.

You may have heard about the 'body positive' movement, aimed loving and embracing all body types. Some people prefer the term 'body neutrality' because it more about accepting your body as it is, without making it an important part of your life. To that, we could add a 3rd term: body truthfulness. This is being honest with yourself about where you're at, but choosing to accept your body anyway.

For women of faith, we often feel ambivalent towards our bodies because we have a false belief that our physical life is not as important as our spiritual life. So, we focus on our souls, but neglect our bodies. But God created us as mind, body and soul – each intertwined as part of God's creation, and reliant on the other.

Choosing to accept your body and take care of it is a good spiritual practice. You don't need to be ready to embrace and love everything about yourself. Start with body truthfulness.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

Come up with a statement that feels truthful to you and shows acceptance of your body. Next time you find yourself being critical of what you see in the mirror, say that statement to yourself.



**YOUR BODY EXISTS FOR
YOU, NOT OTHERS**



DAY FIVE

When we see a beautiful influencer, wearing the perfect outfit in front of the perfect sunset, we all get the message: this is the perfect life. We assume the person must be loved and happy.

So when we long for that elusive 'perfect body', what we're really desiring is to be accepted and loved.

Yet our bodies can't do all that emotional heavy lifting for us. Our bodies don't exist for the approval of others. Our only responsibility is to care for and respect the body God gave us.

In the body positive movement there's a saying that 'fat' is simply a way of describing a body type - you can't 'feel fat'. When we say we 'feel fat', what we're really expressing is that we feel unlovable, rejected or are grappling with negative emotions - which we have channelled towards our body.

So, when you find yourself feeling dissatisfied with your body, ask yourself: what's really going on here? What unmet need is behind my body-loathing ?

Our real need is not to be skinny, but to be loved. The good news is that you are ALREADY loved and accepted - just as you are.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

Delete every influencer on your feed that promotes the lie of the 'perfect life'.

Choose instead to follow people who are life-giving, authentic and celebrate the diversity of our bodies!



**IT'S NORMAL FOR
YOUR BODY TO CHANGE
OVER TIME.**



DAY SIX

You are not the person you were when you were at 16, and nor is your body. We wouldn't want to stunt our spiritual or emotional growth, yet we expect our body to remain in an immature state.

There are many reasons for our bodies to change – health, stress, lifestyle impacts (Covid!) and simply aging. As we get older, our bodies naturally soften and round out to become a safe and welcoming place for our tamariki. What is more beautiful than a child snuggling up to their mama's soft tummy? And no new mum should feel like she has to 'bounce back', when her only concern should be for the new life that came from her!

Why are women's bodies expected to stay the same, even when they've been through the body-altering experience of giving birth, yet men aren't held to the same high standard? There is a particularly toxic lie that it's a women's responsibility to stay attractive, so her husband doesn't stray. This is an ugly example of women being blamed for men's bad choices. In contrast, this is the advice the famous King Solomon gave his son:

'Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife?' ...

'May your fountain be blessed,

and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth ... may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.'

(Proverbs 5:18-20)

Our sagging breasts should still satisfy our husbands!

As women, we give out so much of ourselves that our bodies often don't feel like they belong to us. But even if you join your life with someone else, and even if your children demand constant attention, your body is still yours.

Even if you are single, your body belongs to you and doesn't exist for anyone's approval.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

Have a clearout and donate or sell all those clothes that no longer fit. They don't need to condemn you from the cupboard – set yourself free!



**CELEBRATE
- DON'T
CONCEAL -
WHO YOU
ARE.**



DAYSEVEN

Whether you love to shop till you drop, or dread shopping for clothes, we've all assimilated some fashion 'rules'. Here's just a few examples:

- black is slimming
- horizontal stripes make you look bigger
- hide your tummy
- cover your wobbly arms.

Have you noticed how fashion 'rules' are based on shame? They aim to hide away our 'imperfections', and are always about looking smaller. It's time to break those rules! What is something you'd love to wear, but don't feel like you can 'get away with'? What's your favourite colour that's NOT black? What makes you feel like you are expressing your true self? What makes you feel inspired? Those are our new fashion rules!

This isn't about having a passion for fashion, it's about allowing yourself to be seen from the outside in. We ALL have our own unique style that says something about who we really are – even if you don't like fashion and prefer practical clothes, that says something about you.

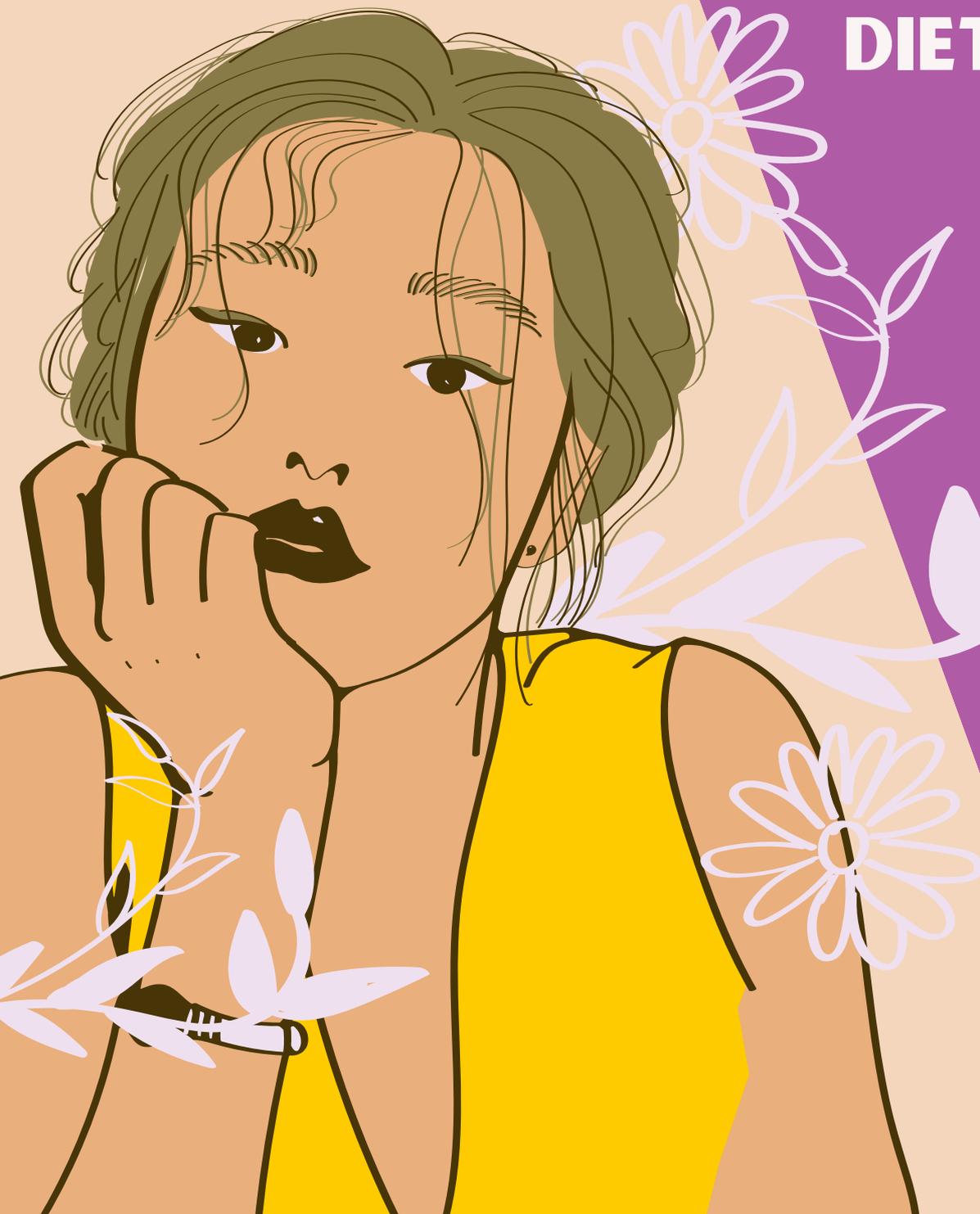
So, let's stop hiding. Let's tuck our shirt into a skirt, wear shorts, show our arms. Let's flip the tables on fashion rules and start to celebrate, not conceal, who we are.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

If you could wear anything, what would it be? What's stopping you wearing it now, in the body you have? Why not try it out – and remember, fake it till you make it. You CAN get away with it!



**YOU HAVE A
GREAT
PURPOSE
- AND IT'S
NOT
DIETING.**



DAYEIGHT

At the height of dieting culture in the '90s, Naomi Wolf wrote 'The Beauty Myth'. She argued that the beauty industry kept women so distracted by a private preoccupation with looks that it stopped them from making a meaningful contribution to wider society. This may seem like a radical statement, but it begs the question: what do I want my life to stand for?

If you've ever tried a diet, you will know that it takes an enormous amount of energy, time and obsessive thinking. That is energy that could be put into bringing meaning and purpose to our life and others.

As women, we're expected to put a lot of work into looking good – from our bodies to dying our hair, shaving our legs, trying (in vain) to stop aging, having clear skin ... and on and on. What has been sold to us as 'pampering', can actually feel like hard work.

Self-care is really important – but the key word is 'care'. What feels caring towards your body, and what feels condemning?

You were not put on this earth to be skinny or have great skin.

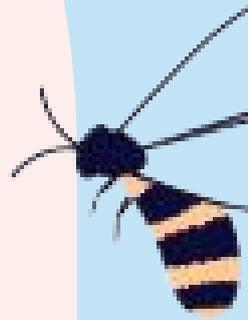
You were put on this earth to make it better. And the world is indeed better because you are here.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

Is there a beauty habit that would feel freeing to let go of?
Or, is there something you need to do more in order to take real care of yourself?



**YOUR
BODY IS
PART OF
YOUR
STORY**



DAY NINE

So far, we've thought a lot about being kinder towards ourselves. But what about body kindness towards others? Our societal obsession with thinness has made us judgmental of people in bigger bodies. Research shows that fat* people are more likely to live in poverty, have lower paying jobs, and struggle to access healthcare.

While we judge overweight people as unhealthy, we celebrate underweight people as beautiful (see most celebrities) – but both actually have the same levels of health-related issues.

Our unconscious belief is that being fat is a choice and it's 'their fault' – so we don't feel compelled towards compassion, or accommodate bigger bodies in public spaces like transport and restaurants.

Yet we don't know their story. We all have unseen disabilities, trauma, genes and a myriad of other things that go into our body make-up. And even if it IS their choice, every single body deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Every body is also a soul and mind, with a need to be loved and accepted. Every body has a story to tell.

As we learn to be less judgmental towards ourselves, it also helps us extend that kindness towards others.

(*Fat is the term preferred by fat activists).

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

Have you ever caught yourself making a judgement about someone bigger than you? In what ways could you unlearn that judgement?



**CHOOSE TO LOVE YOUR
BODY NOW, NOT WHEN ...**



DAYTEN

You did it! Thank you for joining us on this journey. Right now, choosing body kindness may feel much more challenging than going on another diet (hoping this will be the one). All your life, diet culture has told you your body is not good enough. So, you may feel anxious about letting go of the fantasy of your ideal body. It's a fantasy that's been with you for a long time, and losing it means losing part of yourself.

But why did you need this fantasy? Did you think you would finally feel loved and accepted? The only thing stopping you from feeling loved and accepted right now, is your own lack of acceptance towards your body!

The beauty ideal will keep you on the treadmill of self-loathing. But body kindness is a reality that becomes better and easier, and is a wide open field you get to play in today!

There is nothing stopping you from being all you can be in the exact body you have right now. Your body is a gift from God. Go and bless that body of yours my sister.

TODAY'S CHALLENGE:

Think of 3 things your body has done for you in the past day, and give thanks to God for it (make this a regular spiritual practice).



**THANK YOU FOR
JOINING US!**

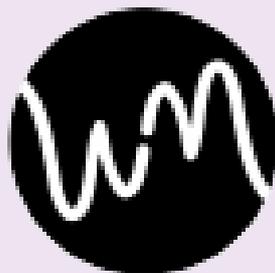


CONGRATULATIONS!

You did it! Thank you for joining us on this journey of body kindness.

Take a moment to congratulate yourself for standing against the megaphone of diet culture, and listening to the still, small voice of acceptance.

It takes time and practice to silence the voice of diet culture, and tune into the voice of of body kindness. But this is God's voice, working within you. Your body is good.



Women's Ministries