



Module #7 of 10—*Short Version*

UK Extension's
Universe of
Possibilities™

SKILLS FOR CREATING HAPPINESS AND BLESSING OTHERS

Accepting and Loving Your Body

Our society's preoccupation with living up to media-portrayed body images is out of control. Add to that the fact that most of us already struggle with an inner critic that too often sends messages such as "You're not good enough" or "You don't quite measure up." Is it any wonder that dissatisfaction with our bodies is so prevalent in today's society that it's practically considered normal?

How might we better support one another in firmly saying no to unrealistic media messages and to the negative inner critic? Realizing that we come in a delightful array of shapes, sizes, and colors and that each of us is perfectly okay just the way we are, how can we more effectively model and teach the art of accepting and loving our bodies?

Suppose you had a close friend whom you had known from early childhood—a friend who supported you in all kinds of wonderful ways, a friend who never hurt you and was always quick to forgive your transgressions, a friend who continually gave you his or her best and, no matter what, was there for you through thick and thin.

How would you feel about such a friend? How would you treat him or her? How might you show your gratitude? Well, this friend is your body, and it's never too late to express your love and appreciation.

Target of Life. Look at the Target of Life symbol that appears at the upper left side of this page. Put yourself on the Target in the center of the heart. Notice that the heart of the Target is clear, unobstructed, full of light. From there, you see clearly and make choices that are good for you and those around you. You feel peaceful, energetic, creative. Your reflexes are sharp, your immune system strong. You stumble and fall less often, and you handle life's inevitable challenges with more confidence and skill. You are naturally more sensitive to others—more patient, generous, and understanding. The more deeply centered you are in the heart of the Target of Life, the more love you feel and share. You are at your best—physically, mentally, and spiritually.

However, when difficulties arise and things don't go your way, you're likely to be pulled off center into the darker areas of the Target. You say and do things you regret. Your immune system weakens and your productivity declines. You lose touch with what's really important to you. Unhealthy stress increases and your sensitivity toward others decreases. And the further away from the center you move, the worse it gets! You experience more heaviness and darkness, more fear and negativity. That's why it's so important to catch early signs of stress and to use all of your creativity to stay as centered as possible.



7 Core Principles



- 1 If you truly accept and love your body as it is, and if you treat it as a dear friend, you'll find it much easier to eat, exercise, and rest in balanced and healthy ways.
- 2 Honor your body's wisdom by listening to its signals of comfort and discomfort, by creatively responding to early signs of stress, and by paying attention to what makes you feel healthy and full of vitality.
- 3 In addition to enjoying a variety of healthy foods and regularly drinking plenty of water, intuitively sense the kinds and amounts of food your body prefers and honor your early signals of approaching fullness.
- 4 Similarly, when exercising—and particularly in taking sufficient time for sleep and relaxation—trust and follow your body's wisdom as much as you possibly can.
- 5 Have fun and be creative in discovering a manageable fitness program that you enjoy—one that includes aerobic conditioning, strength building, and flexibility exercises.
- 6 As a gesture of friendship and respect, go out of your way to give your body what it needs to thrive, perhaps a good massage or a leisurely walk in the woods; and, of course, take advantage of appropriate health screenings and medical care.
- 7 Remember, the more centered you are on the Target of Life, the greater your well-being, the wiser your choices, and the more effective you are in everything you do.

Why are so many of us, in one way or another, dissatisfied with our bodies? Why does our culture put such overemphasis on an extremely narrow view of physical beauty, and why do we buy into such thinking? Why are we, as Americans, eating ourselves into a major obesity crisis while millions and millions in our world family are severely malnourished or dying of starvation? Why do we repeatedly ignore our bodies when they beg for sleep or scream with needless stress and strain?

Fortunately, the answers to such questions mostly have to do with truly listening to ourselves and to one another and getting back in touch with our common sense, our intuition, and the enormous, life-changing power we have within us individually and collectively.

Together we can create much healthier and far more satisfying possibilities. One step in that direction is learning to accept, respect, and trust our marvelous physical bodies.

YOUR BODY IS A MIRACLE

Regardless of your physical condition, age, or any limitations that may challenge you, your body is an incredible machine—in fact, most scientists consider it astonishing almost beyond compare: One hundred trillion cellular citizens that live in an amazingly complex and harmonious kingdom; 60,000 miles of blood vessels; a formidable immune system that skillfully eliminates many kinds of unhealthy invaders; an unbelievably efficient heart pump that beats non-stop 2.5 billion times in an average life; and a three-pound

supercomputer with up to 100 billion nerve cells of lightning-fast memory. The more researchers study the human body, the more awestruck they become.

There's no question about it—you are a miracle!

LET GO OF NEGATIVE IMAGES AND ATTITUDES

It's well-documented that our thoughts influence our physiology. *Don't carry around negative thoughts and attitudes about your amazing body; it's bad medicine.* You might want to make beneficial lifestyle changes that will nourish, strengthen, and tone your body, helping it function at a more optimal level. That's wonderful, but if you have negative thoughts and feelings about your body, dump them; they're self-defeating. And don't complain about your body in front of others.

One of the most difficult challenges that human beings have is to look into the mirror and say, "I love you with all my heart, just as you are."

Gerald Jampolsky & Diane Cirincione

Consider your body a dear friend and ask yourself, "How would I respond if a so-called good friend frequently felt negative about me or, worse yet, was embarrassed by me and complained about me in public?" Accept and love your body just as it is now, and go out of your way to care for it in the best possible manner.

REGULARLY APPRECIATE YOUR BODY

Saying thank you to your body for all it does is a wonderful way to express your love. Well-known physician and author Christiane Northrup strongly encourages gratitude of all types. She reminds us, "No matter what's going on in the world, the economy, or the news, you have the power within you to create the biochemistry of gratitude right now." Dr. Northrup explains that when you hold feelings of thankfulness for at least 15 to 20 seconds, a variety of subtle and beneficial physiologic changes take place in your body:

- ◆ Levels of the stress hormones cortisol and norepinephrine decrease, producing a cascade of

beneficial metabolic changes, such as an enhanced immune system.

- ◆ Coronary arteries relax, thus increasing the blood supply to your heart.
- ◆ Heart rhythm becomes more harmonious, positively affecting your mood and all bodily organs.
- ◆ Breathing becomes deeper, thus raising the oxygen level in your tissues.

MIRROR TALK

In the morning when you get up and look in the mirror, think kind thoughts. If you are a person of religious faith, it's a great time to thank God or the universe that you're alive and to express gratitude for your blessings and the gift of a new day.

This next idea might not interest everyone, but if you want to develop a more positive attitude toward your body, perhaps you will find it beneficial. Before stepping into the shower or sliding into the tub, stand naked in front of a mirror and say with conviction, *"I fully accept and love myself right now just the way I am. I'm grateful for my wonderful body and for the gift of life."* If negative thoughts counter your affirmation, ignore them and continue using your affirmation daily.

The goal is not to build false pride but to acknowledge your body with appreciation and love. *Genuine acceptance not only feels good, it also helps us make positive lifestyle changes.*

*The body is a sacred garment.
It's your first and last garment; it is
what you enter life in and what you
depart life with, and it should
be treated with honor.*

Martha Graham

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY'S WISDOM

As poignantly expressed by philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich, "The first duty of love is to listen." If we are to love our bodies, then listening to them is paramount. Attend to your body's signals, and, several times a day, pause briefly and mentally scan your body from head to toe. Release unnecessary

tension and see if your body is trying to communicate anything in particular.

“Listen” to hunger signals and food preferences. When you notice signs that you are beginning to feel full, let that be your cue to stop eating. Become aware when your body wants to stretch, hug a friend, take a break, or have a drink of water. Recognize when to bless your body with some lightheartedness or the invigorating joy of play.

Journaling can be a great way to tap into your body's wisdom. You might, for example, note your experiences in working with the suggestions above or ask your body questions about its food and exercise preferences and what makes it feel really good. Listen carefully with pen in hand.

MAKING POSITIVE LIFESTYLE CHANGES

There are many superb books and other materials available on taking good care of your body. Here a few quick reminders will suffice: Give your good and faithful body an abundance of high-quality rest. Don't take food for granted. It is a gift. Honor it. In a spirit of thanksgiving, eat a moderate and balanced diet that feels good to you—a diet that includes a variety of

wholesome foods that meet your nutritional needs. Be sure to drink plenty of water and other healthy liquids.

The benefits of healthy and enjoyable exercise are seemingly endless. For several reasons, walking is an ideal form of exercise for many people. Three key components of a well-rounded exercise program are: **aerobic conditioning**, those forms of exercise, such as walking, swimming, and bicycling, that comfortably speed up your heart and breathing rates; **strength building**, such as safe forms of weight lifting and resistance training; and **flexibility exercises**, the gradual, gentle stretching of muscle groups.

Be creative in finding the types of exercise that you enjoy and make them a part of your daily life. Try something that's new for you, perhaps a class in Tai Chi or water aerobics. **Moving our bodies in healthy ways feels good; tune into that joy!**

Of course, it's always a good idea to touch base with a health care professional before starting an exercise program. Also, keep in mind that the more centered you are on the Target of Life, the more accepting and loving you will be, and the easier it will be for you to follow through successfully on your healthy lifestyle goals.



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10 Educational Modules

UK Extension's Universe of Possibilities™: Skills for Creating Happiness and Blessing Others is an educational series containing 10 modules. Each module is accompanied by a Macromedia Flash® movie, a PowerPoint® presentation, and other teaching tools. All these resources, along with a Facilitator's Guide, are available free-of-charge in camera-ready format at the following website: www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/possibilities.

1. **Your Vision Map**
2. **Making the Growth Choice**
3. **The Way of Peace**
4. **Heart Intelligence**
5. **The Freedom of Self-Discipline**



6. **Embracing This Present Moment**
7. **Accepting and Loving Your Body**
8. **Healthy Relationships**
9. **Unleashing Your Creativity**
10. **Gifts of Gratitude and Blessing**

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