



Band-aids for your self-image

Are you intimidated by Gisele Bundchen look-alikes? Do you spend every waking moment wishing that you looked more like the women you see on “Lifestyles of the rich and famous”? These days, there is no reason to walk around with a low self-image because of what you regard as your ‘flawed’ figure...

The beautiful package we know as the feminine gender has a sensitive soul. For this reason, very few women look at themselves in the mirror and think: “Aaah, perfect!” Even those celebrated actresses and supermodels who have 20% less body weight than the average woman, 100% less cellulite and a personal stylist grapple with this issue. Was it really Barbie’s fault, or are we genetically wired to regard our slight figure problems as tremendous figure faults? Every Christian woman knows (deep down inside) that she has been created uniquely and is perfect just as she is... but don’t try to convince her of this when she is trying on a bikini in a fitting room with bad lighting or when her husband wants her to wear a pair of skin-tight leather pants.

The way a woman feels about her outer appearance will have a substantial impact on her self-image and this, in turn, may influence her sex life. Having said this – is it really so vain to try and alter something which is hindering your happiness *and* your sex life? Perhaps you are already doing this by colouring your hair, going for bikini waxes and running like you're paid for it on the treadmill! But some problems aren't as simple to solve. These are the ones you hide under contoured underwear, thick foundation or a flattering hairstyle. Unfortunately, many women who resort to these measures are unaware of the options available to fix them. Experts are used to treating all kinds of problems, and are used to reassuring patients that they aren't the only ones suffering these insecurities.



nude. Jane hates her asymmetrical breasts. Her nipples point in different directions and have made her self-conscious.

Jackie had her first baby four months ago and suffered from serious post-natal depression. Since then, her relationship with her baby has improved, but her marriage is disintegrating. She refuses to have sex with her husband, who finds her excuses feeble, given the time she has had to recover from her caesarean. The reality is that Jackie despises her breasts, which appear long and are drooping after four months of breast feeding. She can't bear to expose her flabby stomach and wonders if she will ever have a fulfilling sex life again...

Breast anxieties...

Would you consider plastic surgery? Perhaps you wouldn't mind taking a few centimetres off your chest, but would never express this openly. Perhaps the receptionist at the surgery around the corner already knows you by name. Imagine yourself in the following situations:

Leanne has an athletic figure and is naturally good at sports. She suppresses her talent on account of her large breasts which get in the way whenever she participates in vigorous activity. She feels too embarrassed to tackle the high jump bar in front of men as the 'bounce factor' causes her too much discomfort. Today, she wonders if she could have been the next Hestrie Cloete. Her body should have been a completely different shape...

Jane has a willowy, slim body which her friends envy. Her bust measurement is in perfect proportion to the rest of her body, yet she wears loose T-shirts and won't be seen in a bikini. She got married recently, but when she and her husband become intimate, she switches the light off, and her new husband has yet to view his wife in the

The insecurities that women have about their busts are innumerable. "There are some women who hardly have breasts at all – just nipples. This makes them feel unfeminine," says Elmarie Marais, owner of a Medi-spa in Centurion who had reduction surgery on her own breasts because they interfered with her daily living and sporting activity. "Some women have very little breast tissue, or their nipples point upwards like bananas." Elmarie explains, "Implants make breasts fuller, making them look attractive and normal." Women whose breasts droop lack connective breast tissue. This is often referred to as 'empty envelope' syndrome. In this case, corrective surgery is undertaken to lift the breasts (mastopexy) and breast implants are then inserted to give the tissue a more youthful appearance. Women who undergo breast lifts and breast reduction surgery often complain about scarring – but this does improve and fade with time. If surgery isn't for you, there is some wonderful underwear available to support sagging breasts, to make small breasts look larger, and to make breasts that are wide apart appear closer together.

A hairy situation...

Elmarie says that her institute treats clients who feel humiliated by their physical imperfections every day. "Some women have unusually thick hair growth around their private parts, or on their stomachs and backs. These women may have more male hormones than normal, or may be genetically more hairy than most. Often, they don't realise that the problem is easily treatable using laser hair removal." Some of these women live with their embarrassment, while others visit therapists, month after month, who spend hours removing the hair with wax. A therapist tells of the hours she spends on a client whose pubic hair grows at the top of her legs and around her buttocks. This woman would never go to another therapist as it is already embarrassing enough that one person knows about her problem.

Elmarie says that while wax is certainly an option, laser therapy is a far more permanent solution. About six laser treatments are required to radically reduce the growth and to keep you neat and comfortable, whatever the problem area. If you have a lot of hair on your chin, however, you should consult your doctor. Polycystic ovarian syndrome (characterised by high levels of male hormones) or an adrenalin gland problem could be the cause.

Excessive sweating

Some women struggle with excessive sweat production, especially on their hands or feet. Others avoid wearing light-coloured blouses as they feel humiliated by the dark patches which form under their armpits during conversation. The cause of abnormal sweating is unclear, although it seems to be something one inherits. Although this disorder is quite harmless, it can cause inconvenience and embarrassment. Some local treatment product contains a high percentage of aluminium chloride, an effective antidote to sweat which can be washed off after use. Failing this, you could try Botox, a safe alternative which numbs the sweat glands for between six months to a year. If you suffer from excessive sweating, consult your doctor to rule out the possibility of



an overactive thyroid gland, low blood sugar or other possible causes.

Unightly varicose veins

Perhaps you don't only have your mother's blue eyes, but also the unightly blue veins on her legs. Although varicose veins tend to be inherited, this is not the only cause. Large varicose veins need to be removed surgically, but these days, there are alternatives to treating smaller facial and leg veins. Vitamin C cream is regarded by many as the most effective remedy for treating varicose veins, possibly because it is rumoured to cause blood vessels to constrict and become less visible. In reality, it is impossible for the cream to enter your skin and penetrate your veins. The best option (for 95% of patients who see results after one to three treatments) is sclerotherapy which involves small amounts of salt solution being injected into the veins, causing them to collapse and fade (www.webmd.com). Treatment using an Nd Yag laser is also effective. The laser heats the blood in the veins, and destroys them.

Body defects...

If you have children, you will know that your body tends to assume new dimensions after your first baby is born. Apart from the extra weight of pregnancy, which many women struggle to lose, Elmarie tells of women whose figures are ravaged by pregnancy: women who used to pride themselves on their athletic bodies who suddenly find themselves sitting with a baby and a rounded figure, saddle bags, flabby tummy and/or 'empty envelopes' (drooping breasts). Other women complain about cellulite build-up after pregnancy.

Apart from the cellulite creams on sale in stores, there are various types of treatments (Silhouette, Endermology and Mesotherapy) available at your nearest Medi-spa. If you are willing to yield to 'the

knife' to get rid of unwanted fatty tissue, liposuction could be an option. This procedure is the most popular form of treatment world-wide, and yields excellent, lasting results.

To get rid of a tummy bulge, stomach reduction surgery (a 'tummy tuck') may be necessary, although echnology is so advanced these days that various routes may be explored before making the decision to undergo surgery. Smaller, unwanted fatty deposits which resist diet and exercise can be destroyed by ultrasound waves using the Ultrashape treatment.

Various beauty salons now have doctors on hand and the new term for such enterprises is 'Medi-spas'. Procedures done here include cellulite treatment to help burn fat – a simpler alternative to liposuction. Elmarie explains that chemical liposculpture is a procedure that uses an active ingredient that destroys fat. It is injected under the skin by a medical doctor.

Face to face

Many women get rid of their wrinkles, and most are not ashamed to thank Botox injections and wrinkle fillers for their relaxed appearance. There are others, however, for whom this subject is still taboo. A deep wrinkle can leave a woman with a permanently cross appearance, and her hyperpigmentation can be so extreme that she has to wear theatre make-up in order to mask it. For the latter, laser treatments and chemical peels can do wonders. Wonderful breakthroughs in skin medication mean that no-one should live with acne, or struggle with pimples on their chest, back and even arms after they have passed puberty.

Women sometimes experience problems which can be fixed using very small procedures. Elmarie once knew a therapist who used Superglue to hold her protruding ears back because she so badly wanted to wear her hair off her face. Women with protruding ears never wear their hair short or wear pretty earrings because this draws attention to their ears. "Often, only a small procedure is required to fix a problem which affects a person's whole life and self-image," she explains.



Skin texture of the average woman



The same image air-brushed for a magazine

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'Hidden' problems

In some cases, problems which affect a woman's sexual self-image the most are those which only her husband sees. There are women who feel self-conscious about the large size of their genital lips – something that can be fixed with the help of a simple operation. Women whose vaginas have stretched, unusually during childbirth, can have the opening made smaller by means of plastic surgery. Those who are self-conscious about their small nipples can have them tattooed using a matching colour to make them look bigger.

"Nowadays you can even have you scars tattooed," says Elmarie. If you feel self-conscious about the scar from your caesarean, tattooing can make it look less noticeable. Women who detest birthmarks on their private parts can make them lighter and less noticeable using an IPL laser machine. Warts are caused by viruses, through contact with an infected person, or they can be inherited. If they don't go away, consult your dermatologist about options like laser therapy and liquid nitrogen treatments. Warts can also spread to the genitals – another embarrassing problem. If you are suffering from moles and warts on your genitals, these can be removed painlessly – you don't have to live with them. Haemorrhoids are another uncomfortable problem for women. You can buy an over-the-counter cream for these, but you should consult your doctor if the problem becomes serious.

Stretch marks...

"Stretch marks are still difficult to treat," comments Cindy, a beauty therapist. They can only be removed surgically. "You can treat the skin with infrared 'skin tightening' (Palomar) and shrink the stretch marks, but you can never remove them. You may think the stretch marks on your stomach, thighs or hips were caused by pregnancy or unusual weight fluctuations, but you may not know that hormonal changes during normal growth spurts can also make skin stretch," says Lawrence Moy, a medical doctor on the web site www.webmd.com. When your skin stretches, or the stretched skin is thick, white marks appear. Laser therapy or microdermabrasion can improve the appearance of white marks.

So, should I get a nip and tuck?

We are all aware of the 'Catwoman syndrome' – a woman who has been disfigured by too many operations. Then there is Michael Jackson... and Playboy models who exchange their perfect breasts for watermelons. Plastic surgery is often associated with excesses which overshadow cases which involve real women who cry with joy for the first time in decades because they aren't called names anymore and can lead normal lives. Some women think that their insecurities are something they simply have to live with, and many do so silently for years.

But how do you know when it is time to seek help? When your figure problems give you a poor self-image and influence your sex life, amongst other things, it is time to seek professional assistance. In these cases, the perceived flaw affects your sense of self-worth and your relationships with the people around you, and can be bad for your marriage.

Perhaps you wouldn't ever consider going, but should you judge people who do go for plastic surgery? Is it really just a vain, superficial industry which promotes everything that is artificial? It is sad that so many women lack the confidence to visit an expert about their problem. They could save themselves a lot of heartache if they did.

If you feel very self-conscious, and don't trust salons, then it would be wise to visit an institute where you can consult a doctor. Even better would be to make an appointment with a doctor who can treat your problem or refer you to a therapist. Are therapists really used to seeing imperfections? Elmarie thinks that therapists who have spent a number of years in the industry really do have relevant experience in these matters. If there is one thing that *can* be judged by its cover, it's a beauty salon. The appearance and neatness of the salon will tell you a lot about its general hygiene, standard of equipment and the experience of the therapists working there. Make your appointment at a beauty or hair salon/doctor/ dermatologist/surgeon TODAY and sort out your self-image. Life is too short for insecurities! ♥

Additional sources: : www.webmd.com,
www.centurionclinic.co.za, www.dermacare.co.za

Winners



The December 07 to March 08
competition winners (INTIEM):

Femagene gift packs:

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