

Think about your best friend and what makes them such a wonderful person. And now, in 30 seconds list five positive qualities of this best friend. Done? Great! Now, indulge me a little by thinking of, again in under 30 seconds, five things you love about yourself, things that you just wouldn't change. Not very easy, is it? If you have been able to write down all five, congratulations on knowing and loving yourself well. And if you haven't, don't worry. You're like most of us.



HEALTH
BE FLAWSOME

That's the key to feeling beautiful, says Minu Budhia

THE PROBLEM

Bombarded constantly by negative external messages that chisel away at our self-confidence and self-worth, one message at a time, we've begun to love ourselves less and less, some to the point where we'd like to change everything and become a different person entirely, just to fit in.

Sad, isn't it? That we'd give up every bit that makes us unique, makes us 'US', to conform, to blend into a crowd, and fade away? Whether it's advertisements on TV, social media, or even people who love you, we're directly or indirectly subjected to the 'Hey you, you're not good enough', or the 'Being you is not enough' rhetoric day in and day out. And body shaming occupies a huge chunk of this negative dialogue.

Look into the list of nots and you'll find we're constantly being told you're not thin enough, tall enough, fair enough, attractive enough, stylish enough, smart enough, and so on. There's no end to the list of 'not good enough' when it comes to looking beautiful.

And as if there weren't enough 'not enoughs' playing, rather preying on our insecurities, we now have underarm fairness products and creams formulated specifically for your backside to ensure that your posterior is as soft as a baby's.

This negativity, along with the perfect bodies and faces that seem to have become the norm across all types of media, makes it hard to look into the mirror, see the reflection, and then feel beautiful.

FLAWSOME

With our self-worth being tied to external validation, it is easy to forget that feeling beautiful is all about becoming your own best friend. And that comes from the acceptance of who you are.

Flawsome, a word coined by Tyra Banks, describes something that is awesome because of, not despite, its flaws. Combining two very different terms, the word brings forth a revolutionary idea — that it is perfectly possible for flaws and awesomeness to co-exist. It echoes a powerful sentiment of self-acceptance. Instead of chasing a facade of unattainable perfection in any or all aspects of your life, take a moment to realise that it is your flaws that make you uniquely you. Imperfection is beauty.

FIT, FABULOUS AND ALL THE FEELS

A common saying that has been floating around for quite some time is this — 'When you look good, you feel good, and when you feel good, you look good'. To some extent it is true. Living in a society that is obsessed with looking, being and projecting itself as perfect, if we find ourselves fitting into the approved

mould; there is no denying that it does boost one's confidence. However, it does that through external validation, and not through a true sense of confidence and self-worth.

If you're looking to get fitter to improve your strength, stamina and overall health, and losing or gaining weight will enable you to do that, you should go ahead. But this journey must be embarked upon only after consulting your doctor and a nutritionist. Any form of exercise, be it workouts at the gym, Pilates, yoga or Zumba, should always be done under the supervision of trained, certified, experienced professionals.

Each of us are unique individuals — both mentally and physically — so what worked for your colleague or cousin or friend is unlikely to work for you if you try just to copy-paste their fitness routine.

When you want to lose or gain weight, look leaner, it needs to come from a place of self-love. Do it because you genuinely care about yourself and your health, not to achieve some unattainable goal of looking like an over-airbrushed, super-photoshopped model, who looks nothing like their own magazine cover.

If you're driven by bullying, peer pressure,

body shaming and self-loathing, it can be all too easy to hurtle headlong into depression, anxiety and eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia, which not only hurt you physically, but also scar your relationship with yourself, food, friends and family.

Your relationship with yourself, with your body comes first. So let's treat ourselves right and fall in love with loving ourselves. And if you're thinking, 'No, this is selfish; I have others to take care of', remember this: You can't do any good to anyone if you're not taking care of yourself.

Love yourself, take care of yourself, and then take care of others, because if you don't care for yourself, who will? Make yourself, your physical and mental health your priority because you can't pour from an empty cup.

KINTSUGI

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise. There is much to be learned from this. Rather than berate and hate yourself for any physical imperfections or emotional scars, find the courage within yourself to get the help you need. Accepting yourself as you are, and being okay with it, is key to feeling beautiful.

Sometimes though, we need help and guidance to do this. Counselling is important as it provides an unbiased, non-judgmental audience who will actively help you to truly accept and love yourself. And when you have healed, remember the scars as badges of honour for having fought the battle to love yourself, to feel beautiful, just the way you are.

MY NORMAL

In some way, we're all chasing the stereotypical definition of beauty and perfection defined by society.

We're all trying to be 'normal'. Morticia Addams, the stern matriarch of *The Addams Family* film and television series, summed up the problem the word 'normal' poses when she said: "Normal is an illusion. What is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly."

Sometimes it takes a fictional character to point out something that has been staring at us in the face for ages. In our everyday hurry to overachieve, be one step ahead, be one notch better at whatever we do, we often forget that we are not all the same person. My normal may not be your normal, and that's perfectly okay.

My beautiful may not be your kind of beautiful, and that's perfectly okay as well!

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