

FIND YOUR SUMMER *confidence*

It should be a carefree time of year, **but if you're insecure about your body, summer can be one confidence crisis after another.** Here's how to handle those meltdown moments with a smile

WORDS DEBORAH SMITH



THAT MOMENT WHEN...

You're wearing a new outfit (and maybe showing a little more skin than usual) for the first time...

CRISIS PREVENTION:**'Wear in' your summer wardrobe**

When we start shedding our winter layers, it can be daunting to go out in public baring more flesh than usual. But there are ways to overcome those self-conscious moments.

One is to get used to the way your summer outfits look and feel by 'wearing them in' ahead of time. Take your swimsuit, for example. You might not have worn it since last summer, and putting it on for the first time while you're on holiday can make you feel awkward. By wearing it around the house, and telling yourself how much better you look and feel since you started following a new, healthier lifestyle, your swimsuit will feel familiar and you'll be more relaxed while you're wearing it on holiday.

Your clothing choices are important, because what you wear can have a big impact on self-esteem. Dress to impress yourself, rather than other people, by choosing outfits in colours you love, made from fabrics that feel lovely against your skin, and with flattering designs that highlight your best features.

Finally, invest some time in self-care. This is really important, particularly if you're not yet at goal. Do little things that make you feel good, like using a luxurious body lotion, or treating yourself to a pedicure – these all act as confidence boosters. I always choose a bright shade of nail varnish that makes me happy just looking at my toes! Even if you have to 'fake it 'til you make it', stand tall and be proud of who you are.

THAT FEELING WHEN...

You're at the beach, and the kids beg you to play a full-on game of volleyball

CRISIS PREVENTION:**Flick on your fun switch**

If you immediately feel hesitant about getting active in your swimwear, or playing with children on the sand, shift your focus away from insecurities about your body by making family fun the most important thing. Remind yourself that times like these become treasured memories. If you let go and really engage with the kids, you will all be able to look back on this moment with joy, rather than remembering it as a time when you were so self-conscious, you missed out on the fun.

Each time your mind goes back to what your body looks like, redirect it to living in the moment. We all know the saying, 'dance like no one is watching'. Well, that can be applied here, too. Play like no one is watching! Swim like no one is watching! Having a good time right now with the kids is the goal.

THAT MOMENT WHEN...

You look in the mirror before an evening out, and feel fat and frumpy in everything...

CRISIS PREVENTION:**Try the 5:1 rule**

Your crisis is caused by how you're feeling inside, and probably has nothing to do with your outfit. Shift your focus to how you are feeling about life, not the clothes you're wearing. What are the great things that are happening for you right now? It's time to transform your internal dialogue and quash any negativity, so make an effort to consciously swap critical thoughts for supportive, nurturing ones. I call this the 5:1 rule. It's when you balance every negative thought with five positive thoughts (these can be about anything, not just your body). Negativity is powerful, so it needs to be counteracted with five times the force!

Don't forget, it's important to treat ourselves kindly at times like these. Many people are prone to being harsh about themselves, and that's not okay. It can be hard to change the way you speak to yourself, but make it easier by talking to yourself in the same way you would speak to your best friend – with compassion and empathy. If your friend was struggling to find an outfit for a night out, how would you encourage her?

THAT FEELING WHEN...

You're in a restaurant and feel self-conscious about eating what you love, even though you've saved all your weeklies for it!

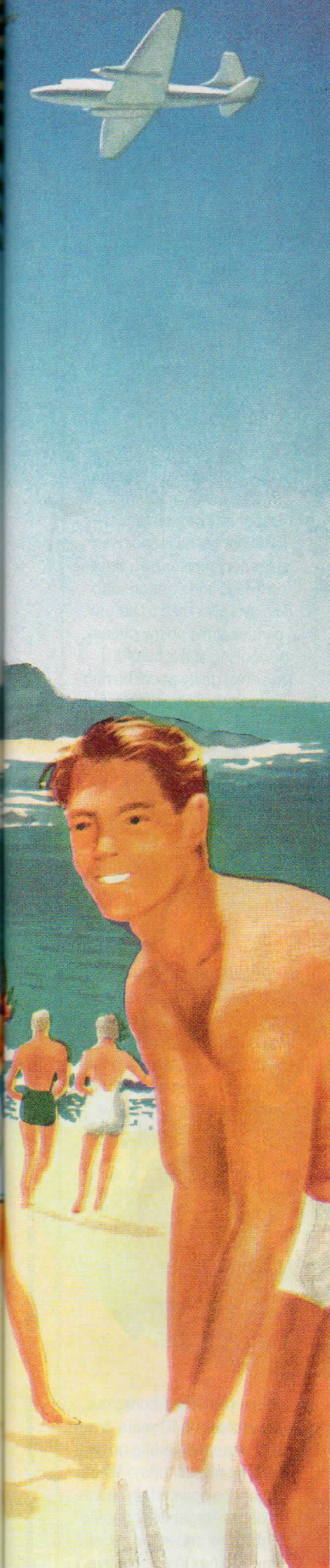
CRISIS PREVENTION:**Focus on YOU**

Remind yourself how hard you've worked to stick to the plan and save your weekly SmartPoints to enable you to treat yourself. Be proud of what you've achieved and commend yourself for it. Switch your focus from what you believe other people in the restaurant are thinking about your menu choice, to yourself, the people enjoying dinner at your table and your food.

One thing to note is that we often assume people are thinking certain things about us, but the reality is they rarely are – most people are so focused on their own lives, they aren't bothered about other people at all!

So, watch out for those times when you make assumptions about what other people are thinking. I like the saying: 'When you assume, you make an ass out of u, and me.'

You are there to have a nice evening. So, savour each mouthful, and appreciate the company you have and the setting you're in. Let others see you enjoying yourself and spread the joy!





THAT FEELING WHEN...

You're looking at a friend's summer holiday photos online and feeling inadequate...

CRISIS PREVENTION:

Build a strong sense of self

We often think we're the only ones dealing with insecurities, but this simply isn't true. Everyone has something they are struggling with. Social media can present a distorted view of someone's life, because people rarely post pictures of their bad days (unless they want a different type of attention, such as sympathy).

Comparing yourself to others is an easy trap to fall into, but nothing good can come of it, because comparisons come from judging others, and ourselves.

When you judge someone else to be better than you, it compounds negative self-perception. But this does not mean that if we judge ourselves to be superior to others we are automatically creating a positive self-perception. Instead, we'll be inflating a weak, fragile ego that can be easily deflated, and that's the sort of ego underlying low self-esteem. The key is to work on developing a strong sense of self that isn't affected by comparisons to others.

If, however, you get stuck in a cycle of comparing yourself to someone, a good way to break the cycle is to aim to achieve whatever it is they have that you want. Whether it's an amazing body, or a happy relationship, focus on how you can achieve it, and be grateful to them for stimulating your drive. When you post photos on social media, don't bow to selfie pressure. Instead, post what makes you smile, whether it's a picture of yourself or your beautiful surroundings.

THAT MOMENT WHEN...

Someone makes a comment that destroys your body confidence, even if it was meant as a joke, or to be helpful...

CRISIS PREVENTION:

Show yourself respect

There are times in life when you have to speak up, and I'd say this is one of them. It's tempting to walk away feeling hurt in a situation like this, and that feeling can stay with you all day – or longer – while the person who made the comment is blissfully unaware. Saying something in response allows you to acknowledge your feelings and respect yourself, and that's very important for your self-esteem. Making it known that you feel hurt will strengthen your relationship as you give the other person an opportunity to know you better and be more aware of how their words can affect people.

If you don't speak up, you might spend the day thinking of a million things you could have said, and find it difficult to move on. Be assertive but kind, so you have a productive conversation. You might want to say something like: 'I know it wasn't your intention, but when you said that, I felt hurt because...'

Remember, you're not attacking them (if you respond with aggression you give the other person no choice but to defend themselves). Be clear that you are letting the other person know how their comment made you feel, and you're doing that because you know it wasn't their intent to hurt you. You'll notice that when you explain your feelings, you'll be more able to let go of negativity.

OUR SUMMER CONFIDENCE BOOSTERS



SIMONE, 28

'I buy clothes that make me feel fabulous in summer, especially bright colours. I also get gel nails and use a shimmery moisturiser, since my legs and arms are on display. I also keep a "before" picture of me on my phone – looking at it is helpful if I ever feel guilty about buying new clothes or swimwear.'



LIZZIE, 22

'I make sure I hit my daily step goal. Walking is not only a good mood booster and helps with weight loss, but it tones your legs, bum and tummy and gives you energy, getting you ready for those days on the beach!'



CHARLIE, 25

'When you're self-conscious, ask yourself, in 10 years' time will I regret not letting go and enjoying myself today? Would I rather be covered up on the beach or forget what people might think and enjoy myself? It puts things in perspective.'