

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

#BodyImageBasics

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*Your body is an instrument,
not an ornament.*

Lexie and Lindsay Kite, PhDs and
co-founders of Beauty Redefined

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WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

Do you ever feel like you're too short (or too tall)? Do you ever wish that your hair was straight and not curly? Have you ever looked in the mirror and wished for longer legs? Do you wish your breasts were larger (or smaller)?

If you've ever had a **negative** thought about your appearance, you're not alone. Most girls and women would like to change at least one thing about how they look—if not many.

Even celebrities—the people we often think of as looking “perfect”—often struggle with concerns about their appearance.

Taylor Swift has admitted:

“I definitely have body issues, but everyone does.”

Actress Reese Witherspoon has said:

*“I have **cellulite**. I have **stretch marks**. I feel intimidated by Victoria's Secret.”*

Actress Ariel Winter claims:

“I had body insecurities when I was younger. I still do.”



It's not just average people who think about their appearance and wish they could look different. It's almost everyone. The goal of this book is to help you develop a positive view of yourself. A **positive** view of yourself doesn't mean that you think you're better or more beautiful than everyone else. Reese Witherspoon said, “Hollywood is one of those endless competitions. But it's a race toward nothing. There's no winning. You're never going to win the pretty race.” Your life isn't a beauty pageant. A positive view of yourself means learning to treasure and care for your body. You can succeed in this goal, and this book will help you.

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU'LL LEARN

- how body image is defined,
- why it's important to have a positive body image, and
- why reading this book and working on developing a positive body image will improve your life in a variety of ways.

What is body image?

Body image is how you think and feel about your body. Obviously, the way you think and feel about your body—your body image—matters. For example, if you dislike your curly hair, you may spend a lot of time trying to

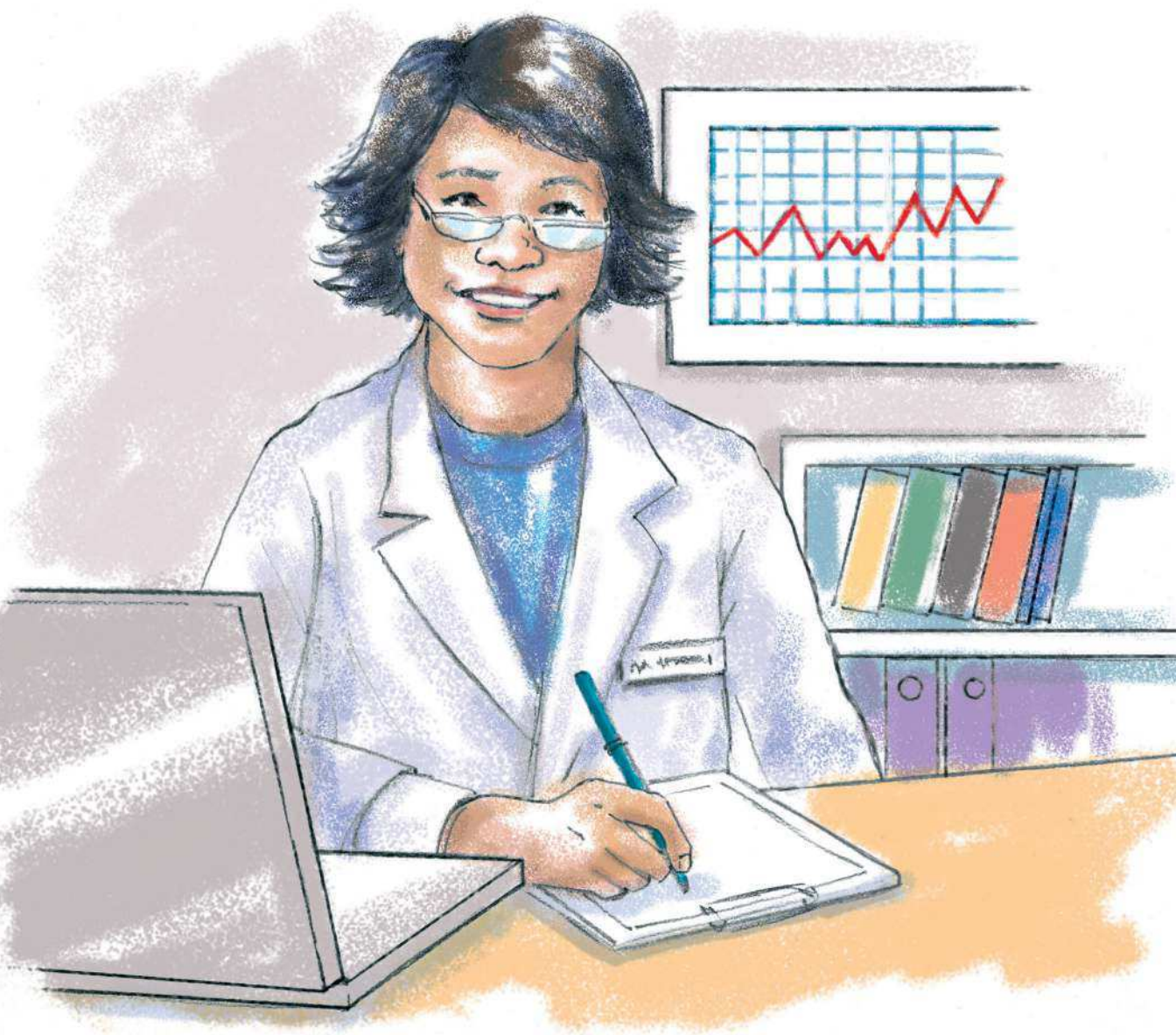
straighten it. If you want to be taller, you may wear shoes with platform soles or high heels. If you really want your nose to be smaller, you may consider getting surgery to change the size or shape of it.





WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

But what if there is a better way to think about your body? Maybe changing how you look isn't the answer. Maybe there is an easier way. **This book is full of information and advice about body image that will help you understand your body and develop positive feelings about it.** Most women I know (including myself) wish they'd had this sort of information when they were girls your age.



MY STORY**Alyssa Elizabeth, 15 years old**

I think I started having some typical body image issues when I was about 12. I started worrying about looking stupid. I can still remember this one time when I was at summer camp, the summer before 8th grade. Everyone was wearing short shorts and crop tops, but I didn't want to. It was hot, but I knew that being that exposed would make me uncomfortable. But then I sorta realized that no one really cared what I wore one way or the other. I started to think about some of this differently—no one really notices a lot of the details of how I look. Who is going to remember? Who really cares? Everyone is probably thinking about themselves more than other people. When I realized that no one was judging each other, I tried to stop judging myself.

Not long ago I had a somewhat similar epiphany (or “ah ha!” moment). It seems so strange that I was born with this body—I was born this way. Why should I have to change myself to please other people? Some of my friends have had these thoughts, too. A lot of my friends are athletes and they have **muscular** bodies. They need those muscles to play lacrosse and soccer. They are great athletes and they work hard. I don't think any of us want to change ourselves, but we all want to feel accepted, and to feel good about ourselves.

I guess it's normal to not always feel confident. But I think it's important to try. My mom tells me that it's OK to fake it until you make it (about all sorts of things). You'll start to believe in yourself and be confident, but it can take time.

I guess if I had one thought to tell younger girls, it's that everybody is a little bit different. You don't have to be “one size fits all.” You should be proud of yourself! Think: This is me.

Why I wrote this book

I have a daughter, and I want her and her friends to have this book and read it either on their own or with their moms, dads, sisters, cousins and friends. This book is full of helpful, **evidence-based information** that my daughter and her friends—and you and your friends—can turn to for answers to questions about body image and related topics, such as **nutrition** and **physical activity**.

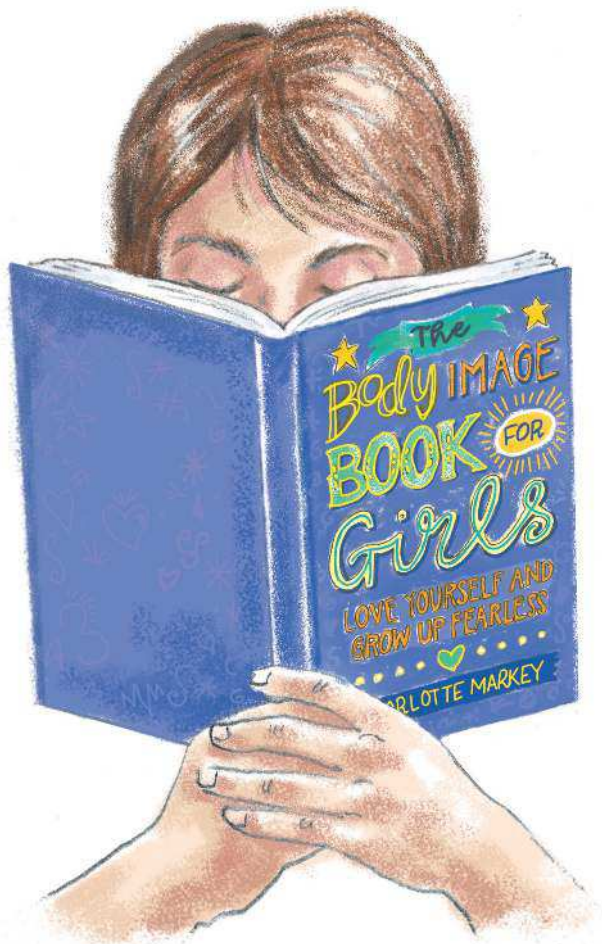
Most moms worry about their kids, but sometimes I think it's worse as a parent when you know too much. I've been a **research scientist** studying eating **behaviors** and body image for more than 20 years now. When I think of my own kids (Grace is 12 and Charlie is 14 years old), I worry a lot. I know about all the mistakes people make, and I don't want my kids to make those mistakes. I don't want you to, either.

There is a lot of bad information available about the topics I cover in this book. This bad information is dangerous, and can lead to risky decisions. In fact, adults often don't do a good job of making sense of what to eat, how much to **exercise**, and when to go to sleep. This book can help you develop good habits while you're young—good habits will stick with you as you get older.

My hope is that this book will be a good resource as you become a teenager and young adult—that you'll read it from cover to cover, but also pick it up when you have a question about something and you want a factual answer. Sure, you can google all the topics I cover in this book, but you'll find a lot of misinformation and myths about body image on the internet. My goal is to provide you with scientific evidence about the issues I discuss, not just my opinions.

In each chapter, you'll find the following:

- **Reliable information:** I summarize the latest **science** on the topic. If you see a pink word you don't know, check the **glossary** in the back of this book. As you read, remember you're a member of a large community who cares about these issues. I don't know any women who haven't been concerned about these issues, and talking about them can be helpful and **empowering**.
- **Q&A:** During my career, I've talked with hundreds of girls. For this book, I've asked them what questions they have about their bodies, eating, exercising, and all the other topics in this book. I provide factual answers to their questions—which are probably the ones you have, too. Below is an example.



Q & A:

Are any of the pictures of people in magazines or online real?

A lot of the pictures that you see are actual people, but nearly all images are modified: one photographer I talked with estimated 99%. Photographs of famous, beautiful people are almost always altered to make them look prettier, younger, and thinner. It's easy to think that other people have perfect hair, bright eyes, no pimples, perfectly white teeth, long legs with no **cellulite** anywhere on them, and enviable noses, but they probably look a lot more like you in real life. If a professional photographer edited pictures of you, you'd look like a star, too! The next time you see a photo of a famous person, remember that the photo is edited.



WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

- **Myths and misbeliefs:** In each chapter, I'll share "myths and misbeliefs" about body image and related topics and explain why they aren't true. Here is an example:



MYTHS AND MISBELIEFS

Telling people that they need to lose weight—"body shaming"—will motivate them to lose weight and look better.

There is no evidence that this is true! In fact, it seems that the opposite is true!

Maintaining a healthy weight (see Chapters 2 and 6 for more information about what a healthy weight might be for you) is important for maintaining good health. But making people feel bad about themselves is not "motivating." If you are concerned about a person's weight or health, the last thing you should do is try to make them feel bad about it. Instead, be a supportive friend and try to encourage people to eat well, exercise regularly, and avoid media and other influences that may make them anxious or upset about their weight.

- **My story:** In the process of writing this book, I've relied on scientific research that takes into account hundreds and thousands of girls' experiences. But I've also interviewed individual girls, like Alyssa Elizabeth (her story is earlier in this chapter). These girls are all between the ages of 14 and 23, and they shared their specific experiences in detail. Each chapter will highlight some of these real girls' experiences, in their own voices.
- **Inspiration:** When it comes to feeling good about our bodies, all girls and women can use some inspiration. Each chapter will contain quotes, illustrations, and bits of information to help you think about your body in a positive way—and maybe even laugh about some of these issues.

- **Find out more:** The information in this book is evidence-based and scientific in nature. In other words, it's not just my opinion, but based on thousands of scientists' research and understanding of body image and the other topics discussed. If you want to read more about a topic, these references will be a good place to look.

I want you to grow up to be strong, independent, and powerful. **Once you know the facts about the smartest way to encourage your positive body image, nothing will be able to hold you back!**



SUMMING UP #BODYIMAGEBASICS

- ✓ Body image is defined as how you think and feel about your body.
- ✓ Your body image may affect your physical health, mental and emotional **well-being**, and your health behaviors.
- ✓ Understanding your body image and knowing how to develop a **positive body image** will benefit you across your entire life.