

KIMIKO SOLDATI

the skinny
struggle



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Diving, Goodwill Games gold medalist, U.S. national champion, NCAA champion

Who knows when you start thinking about what your body looks like? Probably when you are very young. I remember my thoughts about my body starting to get distorted when I was 14 or 15. Before I was a diver, I was a gymnast. My coach wanted me to stay small. It was so confusing. I was becoming a woman, and he was trying to pressure me to remain a skinny, little girl.

Everything got worse in high school. I began to feel uncomfortable and embarrassed about how strong my body looked. In diving, you are judged for your performance and how you look. My diving coach was no better than my gymnastics coach. "Don't get fat," he'd say to us. How I felt about myself became totally wrapped up in how I saw my body.

I started eating lots and then throwing it all up. I thought I could control it, but it ended up controlling me. It didn't help that everyone was telling me how good I looked. The more weight I lost, the worse things were. It was a secret, nasty cycle of feeling bad, eating, puking, and feeling bad again. For a year and a half, I couldn't stop it. I was never happy. It took all the energy out of me. My diving performance started to suffer big time. Finally, my roommates called me out on it. I had to admit that I had a serious problem. I joined a program for people with eating disorders at a hospital; there, we spent a lot of time talking about what we were going through. I learned that my problem was much more about my feelings about myself than about eating. I admit that I always want things to be perfect.

I didn't understand where to draw the line between healthy and unhealthy eating and thinking. It's easy to say, "Accept your body," but it's sometimes tough to actually do it. I wish that I had taken better care of myself during my teenage years. Who knows what will happen to my body because of how I abused it? I might get brittle bones, bad teeth or a damaged heart. But honestly, I was lucky. There were people who cared enough to get me help. I got healthy again. I went on to win the NCAA college diving championship. Now food is my friend, not my enemy. It is fuel for my machine – a machine that I will take very good care of from now on.



Rosa

the skinny struggle

When you are born, you love your body. Babies lie on their chubby backs, looking up at their roly ankles, giggling and smiling. But something happens. By the time you're creeping up on puberty, most girls become somewhat unhappy with the way they look."My chest is like two mosquito bites." "My legs are too fat." "I hate my nappy hair."



As your body changes – so does your opinion of the girl you see in the mirror. The good news is that it is happening to all the girls around you. The world we live in teaches girls that anything other than thin, blonde and looking like a model isn't good enough. Everywhere you look, magazines, movies and TV are all trying to get us into

believing that's exactly what beautiful looks like. Girls diet, pluck, tuck, untuck and tuck again to try their best to look like supermodels. More often than boys, girls compare their bodies to each other and freak out trying to look perfectly the same. More than eight out of ten 10-year-olds are afraid of not looking perfect.

Comparing yourself to perfection can really wear on a girl. Some girls start to hate themselves, others develop "eating disorders" – constantly dieting or eating lots and throwing up, like Kimiko. Eating disorders can be dangerous,

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even deadly. Hating yourself can be just as bad. How you see yourself affects your self-esteem – or how much you believe in yourself. Low self-esteem can hurt everything in your life, including your ability to succeed in sports. How are you going to sink baskets if you're worried about looking weird in your uniform? How can you concentrate at school if you don't have enough food in your body to fuel your brain?

Being skinny will not give you self-esteem or self-respect – those things come from inside. A start to feeling good about who you are and how you look is understanding that everyone is different. Some folks are tall, others short; some are stocky, others lean; some folks have blue eyes, others don't. Appreciate whatchu got and learn to recognize the beauty in whatever it is that makes you unique – whether it's your big feet, bouncy curls, bushy eyebrows or bulky shoulders. You wouldn't be you without 'em!

Quick points:

Signs that a girl might have an eating disorder:

- ✿ Losing weight fast
- ✿ Feeling guilty when eating
- ✿ Refusing to eat in front of others
- ✿ Hiding food
- ✿ Weighing herself constantly
- ✿ Disappearing to the bathroom after eating
- ✿ Always talking about food

If you see this happening to someone, that someone might need help. Be a true friend and ask her about it. Tell her you're concerned. Offer to go with her to talk to someone who knows about this stuff (counselor, doctor, nurse, coach, parent).

You can find info on more than 100 sports, training tips and videos in the GoGirl World gym. www.GoGirlGo.com

Resources

www.4girls.gov
www.bodypositive.com
www.edap.org
www.health.org/gpower
www.somethingfishy.org
www.teenshealth.org