

Carbs, curves and everything in between;

*The link between our bodies
and our issues and how to
transform them for life!*

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Foreword by Doctor Tshidi Gule

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Introduction

I struggled with body issues, like we all do for some thirty years before I figured out “the secret” that the likes of the pharmaceutical and diet industries didn’t want me to know; my body issues were never about my body. My overweight body was as a result of my self-destructive bingeing and my bingeing was a result of my intense dislike of myself and my intense dislike of myself came from being socialised into a world where perfection is praised. This is not to say that society was directly responsible for the state of my body and self esteem (which incidentally also resulted in me exercising obsessively and entering self destructive relationships) but ‘it’ sold a story and as many of us do, I bought it. I bought the story that I wasn’t enough. I bought the story that I didn’t look right. I bought the story that told me I should be better. Along with my purchase I got a massive serving of shame and guilt.

It didn’t end one day with a discovery of some magical cure – sorry if I just ditched your hopes. I began to let go of the shame and the guilt as I began to recognise the story wasn’t true. So this book is about a story; it’s about your story and how you might want to change it. It’s your story, it’s my story, and it’s our story...why? Because as much as we like to believe we’re unique, and yes in a manner we are, we share the same pain, the same insecurities and the same stories. Speaking of which here is an ‘story’ you might be able to recognise...

Once upon a time (before they got divorced of course) Jack and Jen lived in a big house on a hill. Jen spent most of her time obsessing about how her body (and life) looked and Jack spent much of his time obsessing about work and money – both of them spent time abusing their bodies.

It never used to be like this – in the beginning they were happy with each other and in themselves but after the kids, Jen just didn’t feel the same about her body and Jack...well he lost his body to his mind which was busy floating off in a world of worry and anxiety.

A witch, who was cruising around the neighbourhood in her BMW X5, put a spell on them because of her jealousy. She wanted what they seemingly had; a home with the sound of children's laughter. The witch's name was Perfection. Perfection had grown up always believing that things were never quite right. Her parents hadn't given her enough love and she blamed her broken relationships for it. She wanted more. She wanted a gorgeous body. She wanted the power that came from feeling in control of everything.

She put a spell on Jen and Jack so that they would begin to buy into her fantasy. That way when things fell apart, Perfection would seem even more brilliant. Her spell made them doubt themselves and it made them treat themselves and their bodies with disdain. Worse than that, they began to take out their disdain on each other.

As their disdain with themselves grew, their behaviour towards their bodies turned even more drastic. Jen resorted to incessant dieting and Jack resorted to lots of wine. The drastic behaviour had an even more disastrous effect on their relationships, not just with each other but the children too. The children became angry and took their frustrations out on Jack and Jen on a daily basis which drove Jen and Jack's behaviour to the point of fanatical!

Eventually, when both could sustain things any longer, their house fell apart and along with it, their bodies.

They sat wondering why it had happened and they began to retrace their stories.

Jen's story went something like this;

An apple a day,

So that they don't say

Oh the cellulite, what a shame!

This is the body that Jen built.

*A diet! That's it
No darling, please don't fry it
Everyone says it works – I HAVE to try it
This is the body that Jen built.*

*Running on empty
A price so hefty
And yet she thinks herself still not sexy
This is the body that Jen built.*

*And what say she to flu
I have no time. Adieu
And wonder does she, why she feels so blue
This is the body that Jen built.*

UNTIL...

...one day whilst doing her shopping for the guests that were coming to dinner and trying, unsuccessfully, not to snack on the chocolate in her basket (she's on diet don't you know), in her lunch hour, after her doctor's appointment for her chronic fatigue Jen broke down crying and didn't know why.

This is the body that Jen built

I suspect Jack's story went a little something like this;

A glass of wine a day,

Okay so maybe three or more

But I don't care what they say

This is the body that Jack built.

Two steaks, chips and some beer,

Men that eat veggies must be queer

And I won't be mocked by my peers

This is the body that Jack built.

Don't know why I'm so drained

I refuse to feel any pain

Besides it must be all in the brain

This is the body that Jack built.

Rest? Don't be silly

Besides who can afford to, married to such a filly

Looking at expenses just makes me chilly

This is the body that Jack built.

UNTIL...

...one day whilst running in between meetings and drinking his 7th cup of coffee (did I mention he skipped breakfast...no time!), he stopped breathing. All of a sudden his chest went tight and he was filled with anxiety.

This is the body that Jack built

Yes I know it's only a nursery rhyme but this is what we do! We abuse ourselves to the point of breakdown. I played the same game until I decided I'd had enough and with the help of some amazing people, I changed the game.

“Carbs, curves and everything in between” is an in-depth look at WHY we do what we do with our bodies and how to change the game...for good! This is NOT another diet book. This is NOT a step by step guide to being sexy. THIS, ladies AND gentleman, is a book to help you get some perspective and to give you the tools you need to move forward in a healthy approach to carbs, curves and everything in between.

Right off the bat I'd like to say that this book is NOT solely for women! By the very nature of inhabiting a body, you are prone to having body issues. Perhaps let me say that by the very nature of inhabiting a body and living in “modern” (I use the term loosely) 21st century society, you're prone to having body issues. Yes, women might be far more open about the fact that they have body issues but after interviewing numerous men for the purposes of this book I've come to understand that men's issues are just as prevalent. The men of our times just happen to talk about such things less, living in permanent fear that they're the only one experiencing trauma to do with their bodies. Men also tend to express their body

issues differently and often, in more socially acceptable means such as drinking.

Our society would have us believe that men who experience body issues must be homosexual or disturbed in some way; the lunacy of which only serves to perpetuate the severity of which. Men, as if not challenged enough by such societal norms, are further suppressed into secret suffering through the expectancy that no man should cry or express their true feelings. It's ridiculous and high time for change hence this book wishing to attract both male and female readers.

Just as body issues have no qualms over the gender of their recipients, neither do they discriminate by social class and whilst the upper echelons of society might have more money to throw at the problem, the feelings of despair, self hatred and insecurity are just the same as amongst their lower income earning colleagues. So let this book be for all those who want to end the feelings of despair, self hatred and insecurity for once and for all.

This brings me to the term 'stress'; I see many of our body issues being very neatly compartmentalised by the term 'stress' and have come to expect that a massage is all that is needed for it to disappear. The challenge here with this beautiful little term is not actually with the term itself but rather that we haven't understood its full meaning and more importantly the full impact on our lives.

Let's look at a typical example of stress; for instance let's say you're driving along one day and suddenly see a car slam on brakes in front of you. You then slam on brakes in order to avoid an accident. The physiological response as outlined below begins with the sudden and dramatic thought "*watch out, danger!*" that results in a physical, mental and emotional response.

In response to slamming on brakes, a part of the brain called the *hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal* (HPA) system is activated. The

HPA systems trigger the production and release of steroid hormones (*glucocorticoids*), including the primary stress hormone; *cortisol*. Cortisol is very important in organizing systems throughout the body (including the heart, lungs, circulation, metabolism, immune systems, and skin) to deal quickly with the incident.

The HPA system also releases certain neurotransmitters (chemical messengers) called *catecholamines*, particularly those known as *dopamine*, *norepinephrine*, and *epinephrine* (also called adrenaline). Catecholamines activate an area inside the brain called the *amygdala*, which appears to trigger an emotional response to a stressful event. In the case of the seeing the car in front, this emotion is most likely fear.

The brain releases neuropeptide S, a small protein that modulates stress by decreasing sleep and increasing alertness and a sense of anxiety. This gives the person a sense of urgency to run away or in this case, slam on brakes.

During the stressful event, catecholamines also suppress activity in areas at the front of the brain concerned with short-term memory, concentration, inhibition, and rational thought. This sequence of mental events allows a person to react quickly, either to fight or to flee. It also interferes with the ability to handle difficult social or intellectual tasks and behaviours during that time.

At the same time, neurotransmitters signal the *hippocampus* (a nearby area in the brain) to store the emotionally loaded experience in long-term memory. In primitive times, this brain action would have been essential for survival, since long-lasting memories of dangerous stimuli would be critical for avoiding such threats in the future. This is often the reason that trauma responses are repeated even in unstressful situations.

The chemicals and neuro-messengers in the brain trigger responses in the rest of the body;

- Heart rate and blood pressure increase instantaneously.
- Breathing becomes rapid, and the lungs take in more oxygen.
- The spleen discharges red and white blood cells, allowing the blood to transport more oxygen throughout the body. Blood flow may actually increase 300 - 400%.
- The immune system is similar to mobilizing a defensive line of soldiers to potentially critical areas. The steroid hormones reduce activity in parts of the immune system, so that specific infection fighters (including important white blood cells) or other immune molecules can be repositioned.
- Fluids are diverted from nonessential locations, including the mouth. This causes dryness and difficulty in talking. In addition, stress can cause spasms of the throat muscles, making it difficult to swallow.
- The stress effect moves blood flow away from the skin to support the heart and muscle tissues. The physical effect is a cool, clammy, sweaty skin. The scalp also tightens so that the hair seems to stand up.
- Stress shuts down digestive activity, a nonessential body function during short-term periods of hard physical work or crisis.

(Source: Thanks to my colleague Dr Tshidi Gule for the above medical input into stress response in the body)

So what does all of this have to do with our body issues? Well one could begin to say that they begin with stress in its complete understanding. The above stress response was described for an eventuality such as the car slamming on brakes, the challenge comes in, however, when we interpret every event as stressful and stress becomes a state of being as it has in modern day living. Given the

above description of the stress response, we can see that living in a continuous state of stress could result in;

- Decreased ability to sleep
- Decreased ability to cope with social situations
- Feelings of fear
- Increased trauma responses even in non-threatening situations
- Depressed immune system
- Decreased ability to digest food and decreased ability therefore to take in nutrition

You've got a body issue waiting to happen. How? Well of course you might take some sleeping tablets to assist you sleep or perhaps you'd just work more however that would inevitably prolong the stress response in the body. If the feelings of fear didn't get you and you didn't end up drinking, smoking or overeating (or even overindulging in sex – yes it happens more than you might think), you might find yourself on antidepressants to cope with the feelings of loneliness. Even if you ate relatively healthily, with a depressed immune system, you'd be susceptible to illness more frequently and for a prolonged period of time.

So how do the carbs come into this? Well generally 'us' socialised types eventually begin to recognise that this stressed out state of being might not be the best way to live so we embark on (drumroll) 'a diet'! Beautiful! Let's cut out the nutrition that supplies serotonin (the feel good hormone) to the brain and see how we go from there. When we inevitably crash and burn, we lie in a heap on the floor wondering why we have no willpower? Puh-leese if we are going to continue such antics, let us at least cut through the delusion of lack of willpower. Let us rather be honest about the fact that if we were cars, we'd have been trying to run on water rather than fuel. The car just wouldn't go and it'd have little to do with willpower.

Speaking of willpower;

The brain and body are so programmed to habitual responses that the ability to react differently becomes lessened over time as the neurotransmitters weave neural pathways into the brain. The more a particular message travels through the brain, the less likely it is that we might be able to facilitate a different response. The moral of this story; we've become so used to thinking and behaving in a certain way that we don't know how to change it. This applies not only to the body issue itself but also to the manner in which we respond. For example; "I think I'm fat. Let me go on a diet. Sabotage the diet with 3 doughnuts. I have no willpower. I think I'm fat..."

Willpower has little to do with the whole exercise! The fact is that you've become so used to thinking and behaving in a certain way that you just keep doing what you do. If you could look inside the brain with respect to this particular pattern, you'd be looking at a highway. The neurotransmitter is going "why take the suburban road when we could just go on the highway?" So the ability to respond differently becomes increasingly difficult the longer a pattern continues.

Why am I telling you all of this? Because firstly I need you to grasp the fact that your willpower has little to do with you changing your body issues and secondly it's time for us to see how the body works as a unit; your mental, physical and emotional processes are linked and almost inseparable. If you understand that these processes are linked that the different aspects of your life are also linked. You cannot separate your body from your work from your sexuality just as you cannot separate the psychological and the physiological.

This is the perfect time for me to introduce the sex and nudity component. What do sex and nudity have to do with body issues? Everything! What do they have to do with the food we eat? Everything! What do they have to do with our ability to express emotions? Everything!

You see it all ties together; first we buy the story of simply not being enough. This causes anxiety and over time this 'stress'

becomes our normal state of being which compromises our body's ability to function naturally. As a result of the body not functioning optimally, we don't function emotionally. Not functioning emotionally leaves us feeling incredibly vulnerable in the areas of our lives that already leave us vulnerable even when we're functioning properly. As a result we suppress our sexuality or manifest sexual addiction. Either of these states further are further exacerbated by the fight or flight response from the individual in an attempt to 'feel better'. In other words during prolonged periods of stress, the adrenal glands in the body 'burnout' (this is where the term originated from).

Adrenal burnout is often associated with decreased levels of serotonin and dopamine. What elevates serotonin levels? Carbohydrates, sex, exercise, stimulants....pretty much all the things we're either addicted to or depriving ourselves of.

It's far beyond my understanding as to why in books about health there aren't more sections on sex and nudity. Perhaps if it weren't such a taboo subject, half of the female population might not have gone 50 shades of red whilst reading "50 Shades of Grey". Suppressed sexuality has everything to do with our overly obsessive approach to our bodies and paradoxically the startling increasing prevalence of affairs and sexual addiction.

Additionally if we were only able to embrace our nakedness as an expression of the vulnerability we feel in response to the inability to be perfect, we might be an overall happier society.

SO my dear friends, my intention in this introduction is to show you your body issues have jack (excuse the pun) to do with willpower, and more to do with;

- The degree of 'stress' you carry on an ongoing basis
- Your ability to be okay with imperfection and embrace vulnerability

- The way your brain interprets certain circumstances as traumatic and as a result sends your body, mind and emotions into a spin
- Any sense of unresolved guilt or shame you might carry
- Your deepest fears and how the inability to embrace them magnify your body issues
- The degree to which you're buying 'The story' that you've been sold by society I.e. your beliefs about what's true
- Your own story about yourself; how you need to be seen, how you would like to be seen and your own sense of identity
- The degree to which you're prepared to face the 'dark' sides of yourself
- Your habits and continuous behaviour patterns

As a behavioural change coach, I'm fascinated by people and their choices (mine included!) It's a favourite pastime of mine to go to challenge the norms of why we do certain things and make certain choices. As someone who lives in the world at large I'm also somewhat concerned about the state of society and the earth. I see the body as a symbol for the world we inhabit and my concern is that if we continue to punish our bodies on a daily, even hourly basis, in the form of abuse, suppression and denial then not only will our quality of life be diminished but the world as we know it will suffer dramatic effects.

I have introduced the medical and biological components in this book with the help of my most trusted colleague and dearest friend Dr Tshidi Gule however I wish to state that the book is fundamentally about the behaviour associated with our body issues. The book aims to enable the reader to gain a deeper understanding of issues that seem to manifest in and affect just the physical aspect of our lives.

So if you're not interested in reading the book to help yourself then at least read it for the sake of world peace! (Yes, I know, a bit cheeky but what the heck.)

Ready? Let's get to it!