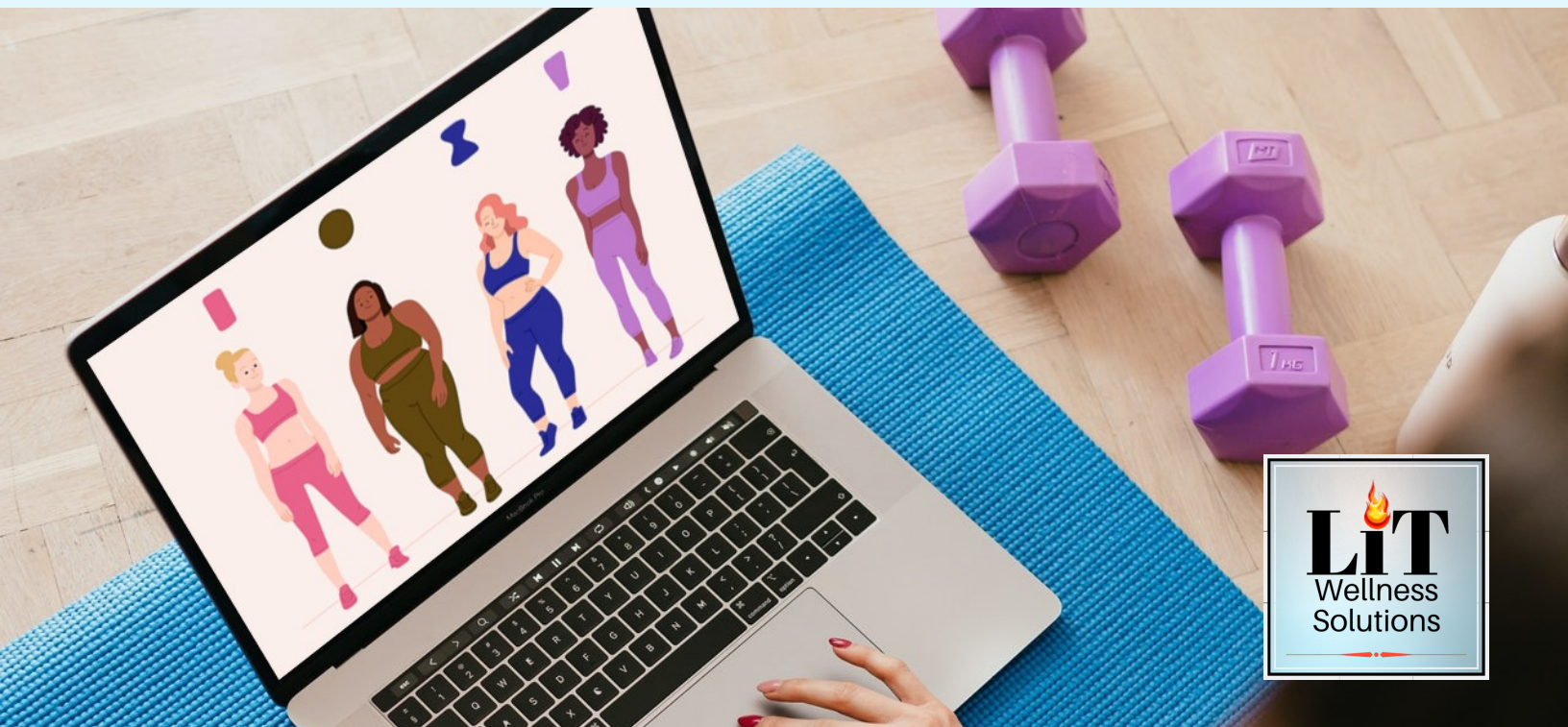


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YOU ARE MORE THAN A NUMBER

*Understanding Somatotypes
and Body Shape*

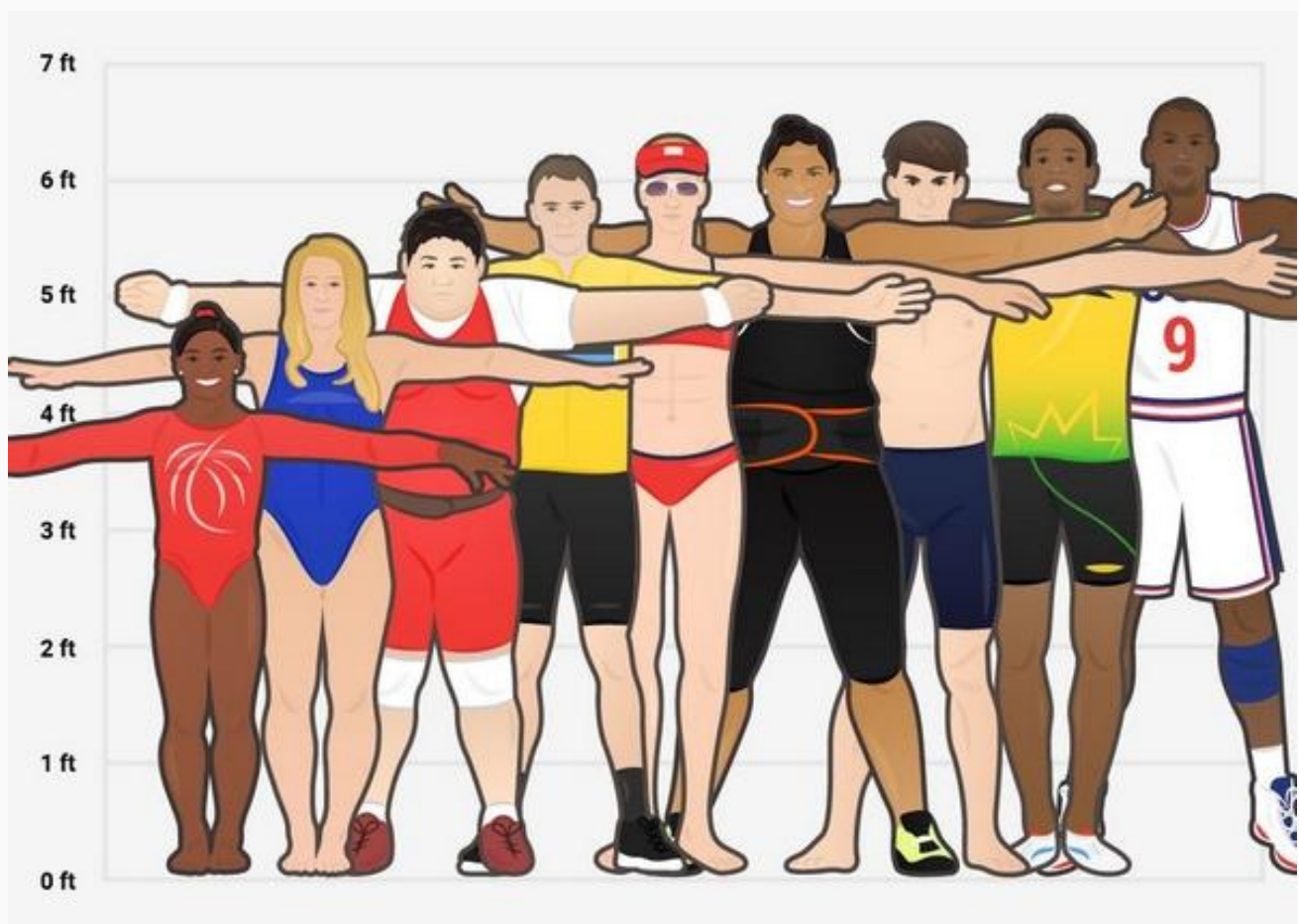


TANYA JOLLIFFE, RDN, LD, CIMHP

Learning to love and accept ourselves and the body we were born in is a journey. This can be especially true if we have experienced teasing or hurt related to our bodies in the past. Being teased for the size of our feet, the color of our hair or our size may only be seen as bullying as a child. Many times those comments don't begin to resonate until adolescents which makes it more difficult to accept our body as it is changing. If our body has been physically mistreated by another, that trauma resonates in the body for years to come.

Somatotype is a taxonomy developed in the 1940s by an American psychologist named William Sheldon. Its purpose was to classify body shape and physique type. He named the somatotypes after the layers of embryonic development. His purpose was to attempt to connect a somatotype with human temperament types. My purpose in addressing them is to help people understand their own bodies better.

We are each unique and so are our bodies. Different body types are successful at different things. Consider the graphic below by Samantha Lee regarding the different body shapes and sizes of successful Olympians.



A successful gymnast more than likely would not be successful as a basketball player and vice versa. However, the propaganda marketing machine has made it their mission to shape culture into a very different set of experiences and beliefs.

Culture is based on shared knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, and values. We have lived in a diet culture filled with diet and fitness propaganda for most of our lives. That culture has caused many of us to lose sight of the importance of health at whatever our size. It has also caused us to ignore the impact of the other dimensions of well-being on health outcomes. Diet culture created a value for thinness that also caused society to develop a weight bias as well. Today that society is very focused on physical health through eating plans and fitness programs while also being very unwell at the same time. The worldly values of fitness and segmentation have also caused many people to adhere to chronic patterns of dieting or disorder.

The good news is that health is not determined by size and shape but by measurable biometrics. Developing a wellness culture with values of health and wholeness and understanding our somatotype and its role in our weight, size, and shape will enable us to refrain from reducing ourselves to a number on a scale or being defined by the size of clothing we wear because of a false idea that smaller is somehow better.

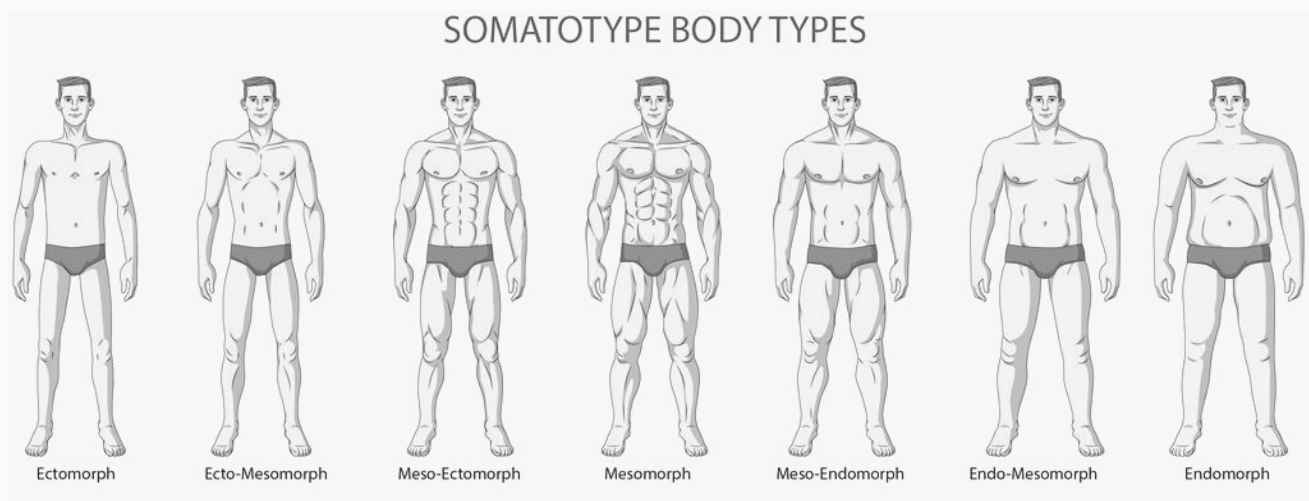
The goal of this e-book is to help you understand that your somatotype is a genetic trait you received at birth that influences your weight, shape, and composition. It also provides you with the opportunity to take a closer look at the impact of your somatotype on your ability to accept your body. Body acceptance issues are often at the heart of lifestyle behaviors that are negatively impacting our physical, mental, emotional, social, and relational well-being.

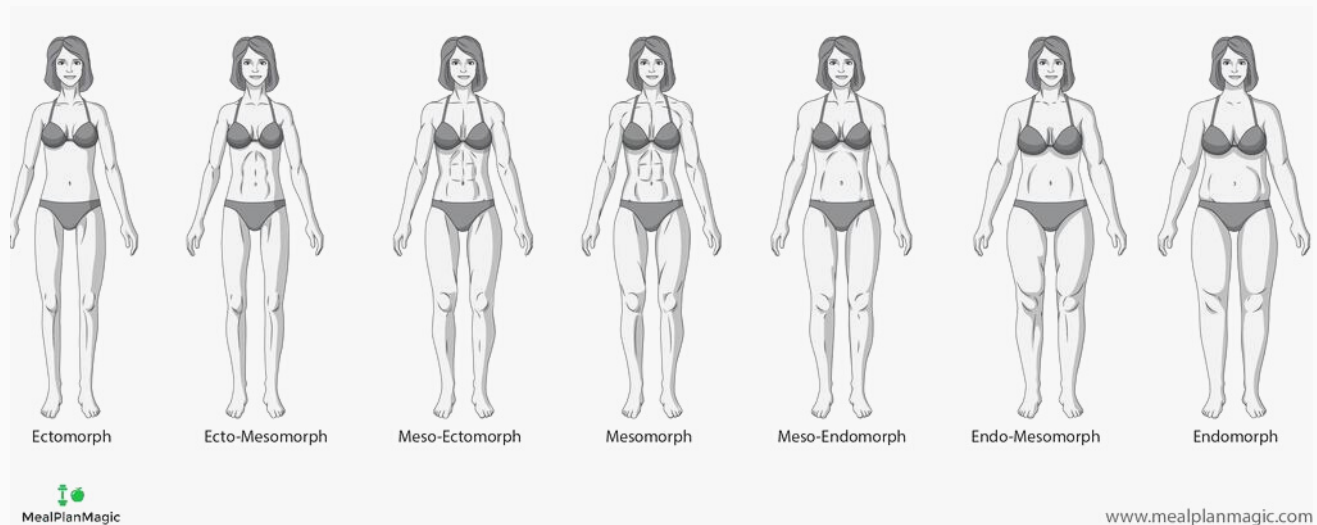
So what is body acceptance? It is accepting our body as it is without judgment. Learning to love and accept ourselves is a journey that starts with understanding how to accept the body we were born with. Not the body we "wish" we had been born with or the body someone else was born with. Understanding our somatotype strengths and weaknesses can help us not judge our bodies in ways that conform to worldly diet and fitness culture. Body acceptance encourages us to no longer continue mistreating our body by what we do WITH it, TO it, or put INTO it.

Dr. Sheldon categorized three primary somatotypes and their physical traits. From these, there have been combination somatotypes identified as well. We are each an experiment of one and our somatotype is unique to us and the genetics of our birth parents. The pictures below show how the body expresses somatotypes. You may find yourself in one of these caricatures or several. There are certainly more than seven body types because there are as many genetic combinations as there are people.

The use of somatotypes is a propaganda trick frequently used in commercials to sell diet or fitness products or coaching services. If you watch the promotional commercials closely, you will often see that an endomorphic body type is shown at the beginning of the marketing segment for a diet or fitness product or program that is being sold. Look closely at the somatotypes of the people that are highlighted in the after section. Usually, the people are not only younger but also of a mesomorphic somatotype which is deceptive and misleading because the diet or fitness product or program CAN not and WILL not change your body type.

People with an endomorphic somatotype have to follow some pretty unhealthy practices to have the body composition and muscle definition of someone with a mesomorphic somatotype. Creating comparison with a different body type goes a long way in selling diet and fitness programs or products but falls short in helping people with body acceptance and making the lifestyle behavior choices necessary to be healthy and whole in body, mind, and spirit. Let's take a closer look at each one of these somatotypes and their composition defining characteristics.





Ectomorph - Tend to be naturally thin with a small frame, long and slim limbs and muscles, while also having a naturally low tendency for fat storage. They tend to have a straight or rectangular shape because the shoulders are narrow in width without waist or chest definition. These individuals tend to experience a more difficult time gaining weight because of a fast metabolism that burns calories efficiently but building muscle mass is more difficult.

Ecto-Mesomorph - Generally a tall and lean build with a small frame. Shoulders tend to be narrow to medium in width with a rectangular shape but the chest has slightly more definition. These individuals still have a relatively fast metabolism that burns calories efficiently but there is a slightly better ability to build muscle mass.

Meso-Ectomorph - Tend to display a more defined physique on a medium frame with medium to narrow shoulder width. They can display a hint of an inverted triangle shape with an easier time gaining muscle. Although they may retain fat as well, they tend to have a fairly balanced composition.

Mesomorph - A naturally athletic physique with a medium bone structure. These individuals easily exhibit a toned body with well-defined muscles, lower levels of body fat, and an inverted triangle or hourglass shape due to having wide shoulders and a narrower waist. These individuals gain muscle and lose weight easily and are easily able to achieve a balanced composition.

Meso-Endomorph - Tend to display athletically broad shoulders with a medium-large frame and some muscle definition. They also have a vague inverted triangle shape but a slightly thicker waist and are strong. Fat stores more easily than individuals that are mesomorphs and fat tends to be stored in the abdominal area.

Endo-Mesomorph - Naturally solid and generally soft with slightly less abdominal fat stores than Endomorphs. Tend to have a hint of a rounded physique due to relatively broad shoulders and a stocky build in the core with thicker arms and legs. Muscles are strong, especially in the legs and they may still have some chest definition. This individual gains muscle but retains fat reserves very easily due to a medium to slow metabolic rate so they don't have the muscle definition of a mesomorph making their musculature more deceptive.

Endomorph - A large bone structure, naturally solid, and generally soft with a wider waist providing a round apple-shaped physique that also tends to be short and stocky in build with thick arms and legs. This individual usually has strong muscles, especially in the lower body with the ability to gain muscle. However, these individuals have a slow metabolism causing them to easily hold fat reserves and not show muscle definition.

Somatotypes are nothing more than a way to understand our physical anatomy. They provide a description of our body's natural tendencies regarding our bone structure and frame size, limb length, mid-section thickness, and the ability to build muscle strength and definition. Some will say the body can change and that is true. But what is also true is that the process of making a dramatic body composition change usually isn't done in a healthy way or with well-being in mind.

It can be tempting to look at images of toned and fit mesomorphs in magazines, on posters, and in commercials of people who have hit the genetic lottery and think, "if only I looked like that." That is what the propagandizers want you to believe so you will purchase their product or service. Don't get me wrong, perhaps you have not made well-being-focused decisions to help you be healthy and well for your body type. Chronic dieting and disorder tend to make people less well and more unhealthy. But you CAN be healthy in whatever body type you have been given. You CAN accept your body and stop comparing it to other people's bodies. How do I know? Because I have learned how to make that shift and I want to help you do it too.

Understanding Your Body Shape

The shape or figure of the human body is based on the composition of the skeletal structure, muscle mass, and fat distribution. Based on what we covered previously, body somatotype is part of this equation. Your skeletal structure is the framework of bones, tissues, cartilage, and joints. Each bone is a complex living organism that stores vital nutrients for use when needed. Our skeletal structure and bone density grow and change as we develop throughout childhood and continue until we reach adulthood in our mid-twenties. Our somatotype helps determine our body shape. That is why some people can easily develop defined muscles while others can eat whatever they want without gaining weight.

Take a closer look at the body shapes in the caricatures by Freepik below. Use what you have learned about somatypes to help you assess the likely body types of each shape.



Understanding your shape and how it connects to your body type not only helps you with body acceptance, it can also help you understand and mitigate health risks. For example, an apple-shaped endomorph with a larger waist size has been associated with an increased risk of heart disease and diabetes because of where fat is deposited. On the other hand, a rectangular-shaped ectomorph with a small frame size is at an increased risk of breaking a bone when they fall or having problems with menstrual cycles and depression because of inadequate fat stores.

People of the same bodyweight often look totally different because of body composition which includes the percentage of fat, bone size, water, and muscle content in the human body. The number on the scale doesn't tell you the whole story.

You are more than a number in SO many ways. Consider the image below from Scoopnet.com relative to body composition and somatotype. All seven of these women are the same weight but how that weight is expressed and the size clothes they feel comfortable in varies depending on their genetically defined somatotype.



The goal is to be at a healthy composition for the body type and shape we have been given and to be able to objectively accept that composition and strive to be healthy and well based on biometrical information so we can use it with purpose. The number on the scale nor the size of clothing you wear determines physical health and well-being. But there are biometric markers you can use to help you find health in every body type, size, and shape. And achieving health through well-being-focused behavioral choices and activities can foster mental and emotional well-being and body acceptance as well. It starts with understanding our body type and shape and understanding how it influences what we see when we look in the mirror. Physical well-being is only one dimension of who you are. Don't give it so much attention at the expense of all the others because of diet culture. You are more than a number.

Action Steps

Take some time to objectively assess your body relative to the descriptions and caricatures above. Not in a critical way but in an appreciative manner that helps you really take note of your unique genetic constructs.

Next, take the thumb and middle finger on your dominant hand and wrap them around your non-dominant wrist. What happens? Do your fingers overlap, just barely touch, or are you unable to make them meet.

This provides you with more information about whether you have a small, medium, or large frame size. How does your frame size reflect your body type? Does it support what you assessed?

Now consider your behavioral habits. Have they been making lifestyle choices based on a diet culture that has been trying to sell you something? Or have they been based on a wellness culture that is creating the healthiest version of yourself? We want you to be healthy and whole regardless of your body type, size, or shape by learning to love yourself inside and out. Your somatotype doesn't define you, it only provides you with helpful information about WHO you genetically are. Use this information and develop the resiliency to ignore the sales schemes that lie to you in favor of those that help you love the body type you have been given and encourage you to make behavioral choices to be all you can be. We are here to help you find your way.

Are you are ready to take the next step toward learning to accept your body type, shape, and size and all its strengths and weaknesses?

Are you ready to stop being a slave to the number on the scale because of diet culture messaging?

Is lifestyle well-being through the creation of a wellness culture appealing to you but you just don't know how to go about looking at life differently?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, take a few moments to check out the coaching tools on the last page.

There has never been a better time to walk away from diet culture, move beyond chronic dieting or disorder, and learn how to live a life of health and wholeness.



Coaching Tools To Help You Take the Next Step Forward



"The Mindful Me Journey" was an Amazon #1 new release in 2019 that has reached international distribution. This 40-day mindfulness-based guided journaling program is helping people just like you develop mindful awareness about **WHAT** they do with food and exercise and **WHY** they do it by exploring daily eating and activity experiences using open-ended prompts that help them become attuned and aware of the behavioral choices that are helping or hindering their health and well-being. This journaling program can help you to!

Learn more at:

LITWellnessSolutions.com/the-mindful-me-journey



The Mindful Eating Coaching Program is a five-week coaching program using "The Mindful Me Journey" journal while working one-on-one with an integrative professional helping you learn **HOW** to take control of your food and activity thoughts, feelings, habits, and behaviors using non-diet intuitive principles and the journaling process.

Learn more at:

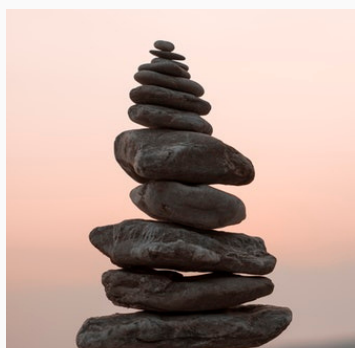
LITWellnessSolutions.com/mindful-coaching-program



Regardless of the lifestyle changes you want to make, we have a **Lifestyle Wellness Promotion Coaching Program** to help you create the individualized plan you need to accomplish it! Let us help you consider the impact of ten well-being dimensions so you can live your best life by addressing any barriers standing in your way.

Learn more at:

LITWellnessSolutions.com/lifestyle-wellness-coaching



The **Healthy Living Virtual Coaching Program** is a 12-week technology-based program that provides daily education, application strategies, and coaching for 12 weeks to help you incorporate healthier living practices into your everyday lifestyle from the comfort of work or home through the convenience of technology.

Learn more at:

LITWellnessSolutions.com/coaching-prpgrams