

EMMA LAURENCE



# Ending the war with my body

One look at her unborn baby did for Emma Laurence's relationship with her body what no amount of dieting or therapy ever could: it made her forgive, if not forget

## THE PHRASE 'IT'S COMPLICATED' COULD HAVE BEEN MADE FOR THE RELATIONSHIP I HAVE WITH MY BODY.

Yo-yo dieting played its part, but the truth is there isn't enough string in a yo-yo to begin to spin the yarn of our shared history. Let's just say we've never really got along, and we've certainly never been good for each other. I hated my body when it was 22 stone of shame and swallowed feelings, and I hated it when it was a hungry but socially acceptable size 10.

Therapy helped; so did meeting my husband. I didn't believe him when he told me I was beautiful, but allowed myself the fresh indulgence of being truly loved.

Once again my weight – and the self-loathing that comes loaded into every pound – ballooned, until the combination of a health scare (apparently a 'morbidly obese' BMI starts to mean something when you hit 30) and a big white dress (big being the operative word) broke the cycle.

I lost almost 10 stone in the 15 months leading up to our wedding – aided, perversely, by a painful but sobering operation to repair the damage caused by years of disordered eating. After that, and with a dress two sizes too small on order, it was suddenly much easier to just eat sensibly (probably the only diet I'd never tried before). And once the confetti had settled, I found a new motivation: I wanted to be a mum.

When I learned I was pregnant after only six weeks of trying, though, I was terrified. I kept waiting for something to go wrong – how could this battle-worn vessel be capable not just of sustaining but nurturing another life? It had never given me much reason to believe in it before. And then, of course, there was the other fear, one I despised myself for: I did not want to get fat again. I'd only just learned to play within my body's new limits, and I was deeply afraid to test them. When my tummy started to swell, the sense of shame was automatic.

But then, at 13 weeks and two days, I saw my baby. A tiny blob on a hospital monitor – but a living, breathing blob I had made. With my body. For all our failings we had worked together to create something wonderful –

something that was wriggling around in my wobbly belly as if to show me how strong, healthy and happy it was in there. Somehow, that little thing was thriving in the mess I'd made of my body. I have spent my entire life breathing in but in that moment I finally felt I could breathe out and no one would judge, not even me. With every new day, every kick that's stronger than the last, I feel stronger, too.



"I have spent my entire LIFE breathing in but in that MOMENT I felt I could breathe out"

My baby bump is not the perfect little ball on a stick I see when I look at other pregnant women. Like the rest of me, it's just a little bit fat. But I'm okay with that: my body may not be perfect, but I know it's doing its best. Some weeks I leave the supermarket with avocados and quinoa; others, it's Toffee Crisps and lemon drizzle.

Mostly, it's a bit of both. I've given the scales too much power for too long – I can give my body a few months to just tell me what it needs. If I want it to take care of our baby, I cannot fight it any more.

There is, however, one internal struggle that persists. I grew up thinking it was normal for mums to live on grapefruit and broccoli. When my dad wasn't looking there were also whole loaves of bread and garage chocolate – always consumed in the car. I don't suppose it occurred to my mum that I was looking, and learning. The proof is in the therapists' bills, the sagging, stretch-marked skin.

If I have a daughter, will she inherit the same issues? Not if I can help it. My body is what it is. One day she, or he, will want to know why it looks the way it does, and I'll be honest. But I will not be ashamed. Because from all those imperfections, the most beautiful thing was forged. ■

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