

Body language

We talk to ourselves all the time, but it's often to criticize or compare. Since the most long-term relationship you'll have is with yourself—forever status: it's complicated—treat your body right with ultra luxe goodies and real talk from women who have come through the other side



OIL THYSELF

Supreme hydration and blissful texture? Now *that's* a perfect match. These six oil-based skin products are sure to delight

Take cold-ravaged skin, stick it in a hot shower and then use soap to wash off whatever hardy remnants of moisture might still desperately be clinging to your skin? Have some compassion! This concentrated shower oil will gently slide the dirt away while protecting your skin from further moisture loss. Plus, that pink glow and bright rose scent is cheering on a grey winter morning.

SOAP CHERIE LUXURIOUS SHOWER OIL IN MORNING ROSE, \$32, NORDSTROM.COM.

As soaking in bubble bath really is soaking in soap, bath oil is where it's at in winter. Jo Malone's new Peony & Blush Suede bath oil will give you hope for the warmer weather to come with its fragrance of late spring's most glorious offering, blooming peonies, while the blush suede will envelope you until the sun gets here.

JO MALONE PEONY & BLUSH SUEDE BATH OIL, \$75, JOMALONE.CA

This all-natural, unscented massage oil from Montreal's Enamour can also be used in the bath or as a moisturizer. But since it is called massage oil on the bottle, perhaps it's best to indulge in a foot massage next time you're Netflixing. Add a little drop of peppermint essential oil for a tingly treat.

ÉNAMOUR MASSAGE OIL, \$20, ENAMOUR.CA.

Winter's all about layers: layers of clothes, layers of blankets, layers of moisture. If you like to slather on a favourite fluffy, rich cream after bathing, do it! But then follow it up with a body oil to seal that moisture in and keep the harshness out. This all-natural oil's night-blooming-jasmine aroma makes it your perfect top layer.

HERBIVORE GLOWING HYDRATION JASMINE BODY OIL, \$56, THEDETOXMARKET.CA.

If slick and slippery isn't your preferred moisture mode, go for a dry oil. This feather-light spray, scented with orange blossom from Provence, absorbs quickly, leaving a satin finish and is 98 per cent natural.

BASTIDE HUILE SECHE EPATANTE BRILLIANT DRY OIL MIST, \$68, HOLTRENFREW.COM

Do French girls shimmer? Oh, probably. So pass that limited edition bottle of rich oils infused with pink oxides and gold mica, and smelling of rose otto and amyris sandalwood. This special treat should be your final touch no matter how many oils you're already slathered with. "Oh, my rose-gold glow? I didn't notice."

FRENCH GIRL LUMIÈRE HUILE POUR LE CORPS IN ROSE DORÉE, \$62, FRENCHGIRLORGANICS.COM

I had a secret tummy tuck, and it was the best thing I ever did

BY IVY AARON*

Like the good friend that I am, I was trying not to stare at my friend's terrifyingly long nipple as she wrestled it into her newborn's mouth when she dropped this bomb on me: "I'm going to have an abdominoplasty," she said breezily, her second-born happily guzzling away in her arms. "My husband got laser eye surgery, so I get this."

I was scandalized. She was a social worker! Plastic surgery was only for the very rich, or the very vain. Or strippers. Right? "Normal" women didn't get tummy tucks. They wrote inspiring Insta posts about respecting their post-partum bods, and then trimmed down with Pilates. Maybe they still carried some "baby weight," but otherwise, their bodies were more or less the same after children. I thought this would be me, too. And then I went through two back-to-back pregnancies, and discovered I was very, very wrong.

I went into my baby-making Olympics (two babies in two years) pretty slim, but extra weight hung around after each pregnancy, ultimately leaving me about 25 pounds heavier. But it wasn't the weight that bothered me so much as the stretched-out skin.

The rapid expansion/shrink cycle had left my stomach looking like a large, melted purse that hung over the front of my body. I could spread it out on a table. My husband had to lift it up to get it out of the way when he was performing his...husbandly duties. It got caught in zippers. I would look at my healthy kids and talk to myself about what my amazing not-teenage-anymore-and-that's-ok! body had done. I would try to take to heart the things I'd always believed, like women shouldn't have to look a certain way and that it was a waste of precious energy wishing that my post-baby body looked like my Dating Ninja 10-years-younger body, but I just couldn't get over it.

I was in grade five—10 years old—when I got my period. Within a year, I grew perky, A-cup boobs, my hips widened and I spurted up to be taller than all my male cousins. I never really grew again after that. It wasn't until I bought my first thong at 12, that I realized that I had stretch marks—unruly, silver lines that looked like asymmetrical spider webs—all over my hips. I stood in front of my full-length mirror wearing a black, cotton thong, and instead of feeling young and beautiful, all I felt was shame.

My stretch marks haunted me for more than a decade. I refused to have sex in well-lit rooms. If I had to wear a bikini on holiday, at the cottage,

or at the pool with friends, I'd spend hours alone in my bedroom, wearing my bikini bottoms and inspecting my marks. I bought endless bottles of Bio-Oil, shea butter and vitamin E capsules and rubbed them in every night. The marks wouldn't fade. For 14 years, my stretch marks were my biggest insecurity.

I met Brandon at a club when I was 26. He was an engineer from Sacramento who was in town on business, but only for a few nights.

We had sex in his hotel room, under the harsh bright lights of the bathroom mirror. He whispered, "Look at yourself." My hips were exposed—I was

I felt disgusting. I turned off the lights when showering because I couldn't stand to look at myself. If I lost weight, it got worse, because the skin drooped more. I didn't let my husband see me naked for four years. Once, when he peeked behind the shower curtain for a kiss, I shrieked at him to get out. If his hand brushed my midsection when we were cuddling, I cringed. He withdrew. Our sex life suffered, casting a chill over our whole relationship.

One day after we turned our basement into a playroom, I had an epiphany. I had just spent \$40,000 renovating our house, leading to a much-improved quality of life. What if I spent about \$12,000 renovating myself? What if I got a tummy tuck?

I proposed this to my husband. We aren't wealthy—he's a graphic designer and I work in communications—so there was no room in the household budget for mommy's tummy. I told him I'd pay for it, financing it by cashing out all of my company stocks, saving for a year and topping those off with my line of credit. I finished my pitch with: "I'll feel better about myself, which will make me want to have sex, and I'll let you see me naked again. It's an investment in our future!"

I didn't need to sell him twice.

Not that I still didn't feel ridiculous, wasteful and vain. I was convinced I was going to die during surgery because that's what happens to women who are ridiculous, wasteful and vain, and then for the rest of my life everyone would whisper how I died getting a tummy tuck because I was so shallow.

The first step in not dying during surgery even though you deserve it is, of course, finding a surgeon who isn't going to kill you. After some research and some CIA-level secretive word-of-mouth references, I settled on Dr. Brett Beber. He came highly recommended not only for not killing anyone but also for being responsible for at least half the classy post-baby mom boobs in Leaside. (He also, it seems, has a fair amount of teachers among his patients. See? Teachers get tummy tucks, too! They're good people. They love children!). He examined me and patiently talked me through the procedure. I was a good candidate because I wasn't overweight, the number on the scale had been stable for several years, and I was healthy and relatively young (42). I wouldn't need significant liposuction (most, but not all, abdominoplasties involve some combination of removing loose skin, tightening abdominal muscles and liposuction.) Then I asked him the most important question of all:

"What's the lie I can tell?"

He smiled and shrugged. "Some people say a hernia...some say fibroids..."

I confessed the real story to my female boss, but settled on the vaguely horrifying phrase "lady surgery" to embarrass my mostly male colleagues into silence over my upcoming absence. I told some carefully selected friends (whose near-unanimous response was: "I wish I could have one, too!") the truth, but kept everyone else, including my family—who I knew would be judgey and would even try to talk me out of it—in the dark.

The day of the operation, I waited with the other day surgery patients in our gowns. "Oh God, please, please, please don't let any of them find out I'm here for a tummy tuck," I kept praying, looking around at all the people who were probably there for necessary operations because they had actual problems. After what seemed like forever, Beber retrieved me and introduced me to his medical resident.

"She's going to be my muscle today," he said as he drew what looked like a road map for a football play on my belly with black markers.

"I keep telling Dr. Beber he's the first man to see me naked since I had kids," I joked to the resident, who didn't crack so much as a smirk. Oh God, she didn't go to medical school to do tummy tucks, I thought. She's wondering how her life came to this! She wanted to save lives!

In the operating room, Beber slid on the compression stockings I'd be wearing during the surgery and for the next few days as the anesthesia kicked in. "Good-night!" he said cheerfully.

When I woke up just over two hours later, my belly skin purse was gone. "It's like a miracle," I said to no one in particular. Beber had removed only about a pound of flesh, but it was my least favourite pound ever. I was home by dinnertime. I had to wear a medical compression girdle for a month (sexy!). I also had drainage tubes coming out of my belly going into little plastic bottles that filled with yellowish, blood-tinged fluid (yes, gross!). I had to empty them several times a day for 10 days, but I was back at the office—albeit moving around gingerly—within two weeks. I didn't die! The universe didn't strike me down for being vain and shallow! I started letting my husband look at me without a negligee again.

Four years later, I still feel silly about it, but I've never regretted my secret tummy tuck for a second. About six weeks after the operation, my husband and I had totally nude, all-over-the-living-room-floor sex. Afterwards, I whispered, amazed: "Honey, I'm naked!"

He ran his hand over my body and I didn't shrink away. "I know," he said, smiling. "I like it."

It was the best thing I ever did for myself, and for my marriage. But that doesn't mean I'm going to tell anyone about it, of course.

*IVY AARON IS A PSEUDONYM. OBVIOUSLY.

I learned to own my stretch marks—and I finally felt sexy

BY CHRISTINA GONZALES

used to looking away. It was the first moment I saw myself as sexy, and the feeling was overpowering.

That was my sexual awakening. My entire perception shifted: My body, as a whole, was greater than the sum of its parts. It was a vessel for self-love, pleasure and satisfaction. I didn't need to obsess over my stretch marks anymore. They became irrelevant—now, I often forget they're there.

Sometimes, though, I catch a glimpse of them when I'm making love to my fiancé in our sun-lit, 18th-floor condo, as he runs his hands over my hips. The only feeling that floods me in those moments? Pure delight.