Must I have a bust? [1]

Dear Alice,

I have really small boobs. I know everybody says it doesn't matter, but I know to guys it does. I'm afraid if I'm doing something with a guy and he feels them, he'll laugh or something. It didn't happen last time, but it could with my new boyfriend. Is this just a confidence problem or something else?

Sincerely,
A member of the itty bitty titty committee

Answer

Dear member of the itty bitty titty committee,

Believe it or not, only a very small percentage of breasts fit into the “perfect” (read: unrealistic) standard that has been manufactured through advertisements, movies, pornography, and other mainstream media. The reality is that people are sporting all types of boobs under their clothes — there’s a huge range of shapes, colors, and sizes out there. Breasts range from small to large, they may be flat, full, or pointy, and plenty of breasts have stretch marks on them, while others may not. Nipples, like breasts, come in a variety of sizes and colors. Many people have hair growing around their nipples, and some may have one or two inverted nipples. Breasts also change over the lifespan, so puberty, aging, and weight change may all affect their size and appearance. All this to say: there's no “normal” when it comes to boobs. And just as there is a variety in breasts, there is a variety in breast preference. That being said, it's possible that if you're not feeling confident about your breasts, it may influence the worries you have with your new boyfriend.
You may want to reflect on why you feel your new boyfriend will laugh or otherwise be displeased with your breasts. Has he made comments about them? Has he done anything to make you feel as though your breasts were inadequate? If he has, you may want to speak with him about how that makes you feel and think about if you’d want to be intimate with someone who isn’t kind to you about your body. If he hasn’t, it may be helpful to reflect on why you feel he would do this and how your feelings about your breasts may play a role. You’re not alone in feeling self-conscious about breast size, but there are ways to help you overcome it.

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists [2], only five percent of women actually resemble the “ideal” examples seen in the media, yet advertisements use these unrealistic images to generate insecurity and sell products. Given these external pressures to fit an unattainable ideal, it may be tough to accept people’s bodies as they are. However, working towards a healthy body image may lead to positive life choices, less self-judgment and judgment of others, more comfort in relationships, and improved self-esteem.

Body image is a factor of self-esteem and based in how people think and feel about their physical attributes. Relatedly, self-esteem is how much a person likes themselves holistically and the two concepts often fall hand in hand. Here are some tips for how to boost self-esteem:

- **Care for your body.** Rather than stressing about how your body looks, eating healthy food, physical activity, and drinking water may make your body feel more comfortable.
- **Focus on what makes you happy** by spending time practicing skills or hobbies that you enjoy (or finding some new ones). You might remind yourself that you’re more than your appearance!
- **Identify negative self-talk** by asking yourself if you would say similar things to someone else. If you wouldn’t, consider why you think they’re okay to say to yourself. When you notice problematic ideas come up, try recognizing them and reframing them to be more positive.
- **Forgive yourself.** Remember, finding confidence is a process, and your thinking and perspectives may not shift in a day. When you have negative thoughts about yourself, you could focus on what you’ve learned, rather than beating yourself up for having the thought in the first place.

Some people may also want to change the appearance of their breasts. There are no products or exercises that are capable of specifically changing breast size or shape. If you’re considering breast implants or augmentation, there are a few notes to keep in mind. The appearance of the breasts can still shift and change after the surgery, as the body ages or experiences weight fluctuations. Additionally, while breast augmentation may increase breast size, it doesn’t necessarily improve self-esteem or body image. A health care provider could walk you through the process and provide more information specific to your body if that’s a route you’re interested in taking. You may also find speaking with a mental health professional to be beneficial if you’re looking to improve your self-confidence and body image without making changes to your body.
Ultimately, your boobs are yours and it’s up to you to figure out what you need to feel comfortable with your unique pair. If a partner ever makes you feel that your breasts are anything less than awesome, you may want to ask yourself if they’re someone you want to be with in the first place. Long live the itty bitty titty committee!

Alice!

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