

Mind Games Is It Cheating If It Isn't Physical?

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Celebrate every inch of the skin you're in. Your bod, no matter what your weight or age, is your temple. Worship it through pampering, exercising and good old self love. Get the love fest going with these five steps to a nude and improved you. ❖

By Jenyne M. Raines

✦ Get (Even) Toned

Cheetah-like markings can kill the desire to unveil. One of our biggest concerns is uneven skintone, which usually shows up on the back, butt, arms and legs.

Skin of color is prone to dark marks because the melanocytes, or pigment cells, are very active in black skin. Simple everyday friction that comes about in using your arms, knees and sitting produces a rush of melanocytes to the irritated area. A combination of soy and salicylic acid will inhibit the production of new melanocytes, while exfoliating existing spots. Reach for **Ambi Soft & Even Skin Tone Enhancing Moisture Cream**, with shea butter for intense moisturization.

✦ Get Buffed

Nude ambitions begin with smooth curves. "Exfoliation gets rid of the dead skin and allows your moisturizers to penetrate where they can do the most good," says New York City-based aesthetician Soli Davis. Once a week use a gentle scrub. Three we love: **Kiehl's Creme de Corps Soy Milk & Honey Body Polish**, **Elemis Exotic Lime and Ginger Salt Glow** and **Intellecthetics Citrus Skin Polisher**. Pay close attention to areas like elbows and knees. To help circulation and remove toxins, apply the scrub in a circular motion away from your heart, down your belly to your hips, thighs and legs and up to your shoulders and arms. Davis suggests.

✦ Get Physical

Enjoy the sheer physicality of your body and revel in your strength. Fitness expert Nikki Kimbrough, of Bally Total Fitness, says you can increase your body awareness and pleasure by doing something as simple as walking with a friend or walking up and down the stairs of your house for 20 minutes a day. When you start getting comfortable, try yoga, Pilates or even salsa lessons.

✦ Get to Know You

No matter how fierce the booty is, it doesn't mean a thing if you can't appreciate it. It is widely assumed black women have a more positive body image than white women, but there is more to the story, says Shanette M. Harris, Ph.D., associate professor and a psychologist at the University of Rhode Island. "The bulk of the studies were done by white women regarding the white woman's body and their standards of attractiveness. There were no studies that looked specifically at black women and how we are different." We are just as susceptible to negative self-image and lack of self respect. One of the key ways to kick off the process of loving yourself is through forgiveness and affirmations to reprogram how you think. Look into the mirror and say something positive: "I love myself" or "I am favored by God." Write them down and place them all over the house. Schedule time each day for prayer, meditation and visualization, which help you celebrate and love the beautiful woman you are. "Black women have not been allowed to express our beauty psychologically or behaviorally and it is time to break free," Harris says. "It is time to fly!"

✦ Get Moist

Soft and supple-looking skin is the key to a bare-worthy body. Hydrate your skin inside and out. New York City dermatologist Fran E. Cook-Bolden, M.D., says. "Make sure you drink six to eight glasses of water. Plus, apply a moisturizer three times a day to the skin—morning, after work when you change clothes, and before you hit the bed—to counteract dryness." The most effective ash zappers are generally creams or creamy lotions with emollients and humectants that lock moisture into the skin. Three to slather on: **Cetaphil Moisturizing Cream**, **Lierac Paris Hydrophilia Super Body Cream** and **Vaseline Petroleum Jelly**. Drier than the Sahara during the winter months? Step up your level of moisturizing with a cosmeceutical-grade one that includes alpha hydroxy or beta acids to get rid of the flakiness, Dr. Bolden says.

Get nude and improved in no time with these simple moves.

✦ **At bedtime** use a fragrant cream with delicious notes of vanilla, chocolate or orange. Treat yourself to **Laura Mercier French Vanilla Soufflé Body Creme** and **Missoni Body Butter**.

✦ **Engage all of your senses** to create, play and pamper. Try this detox scrub recipe created by aesthetician Soli Davis.

In a large bowl combine the following:

- 2 tablespoons of sea salt
- 2 tablespoons of raw sugar
- 2 tablespoons of grapeseed oil
- 2 tablespoons of almond oil

Add mixture to your favorite liquid body cleanser, along with 15 drops of a lavender essential oil, such as **Jurlique's Lavender Essence**.

✦ **Get saucy with it!** Sign up to pole dance your way to a slimmer more confidently sexy you with cardio striptease classes offered nationwide by the **S Factor** (www.sfactor.com) and at select **Bally Total Fitness** (www.ballyfitness.com).

✦ **Get to know your body.** Try **S Factor's** founder Sheila Kelly's explore-your-body exercise: Lay on your back and bring your left hand on your face, moving it to the breast and over your muscles and curves. Think of your body as an uncharted island and discover all of the textures, sizes and curves that make you you.

✦ **Help mother nature along** with a tinted body moisturizer with a subtle shimmer like **DuWop Revolution in Dark** and **Avon Skin So Soft Satin Glow for Medium Skin Tones** for gleamy, can't-wait-to-touch skin.

Jenyne M. Raines, author and blogger at beautylicious.theguide.com, writes from Brooklyn, New York.