P.S. I Love Me

Today is Valentine's Day. We know it as a day of love; it's a day to show you care about a special someone; it's a day to treat another with chocolate-dipped strawberries, fancy dinners and gooey love letters. But what if we turn it around? What if it doesn't always have to be about showing your love to someone else? Why do we not share that love with *ourselves*?

Life is tough. No matter who you are, what your capabilities are, how you are peceived, we all struggle from time to time. Living with chronic illness or disability can make it even tougher. Your self esteem, confidence and the way you view yourself can take a massive blow. We can lose our respect towards our bodies and our inner being. It can be easy to think that if our bodies aren't going to do right by us then *why should we do right by them*?

I have been struggling lately with how I see my body. I hate that I can't exercise to make it look good or to make it strong and fit. I look at my wobbly arms or my not-so-flat stomach and cringe. I feel the exhaustion, nausea, pain and lightheadedness after a short catch up with friends and am disheartened. So I get angry at my body and a slight feeling of loathing towards it has crept in. I have also been letting my body's faults affect my self esteem and happiness. I have been on holiday from uni for the past 2 1/2 months and have fallen into the downward spiral of Netflix binging and (necessary) naps. This has led to me feeling a bit useless, just dragging along with no purpose. I compare myself to other people and their active and svelte bodies, gorgeous children, interesting jobs, fantastic travel stories and five year plans.

Valentine's Day hasn't always been the largely commercial absurdity that it has become today. Did you know that it originated as a Western Christian day of feasting to honour

saints named Valentinus? It is celebrated in various ways and for many cultural, religious and commercial reasons around the world. It can be a day to show love, a day of romance, a day to honour saints and martyrs, and a day to welcome spring and good health. It has even been said that it is the day the birds propose to each other or marry (I think this is my favourite!). There are so many different meanings associated with Valentine's Day. So I want us to also associate **self-love** with it too.

When illness or disability affects every aspect of your life day in, day out, it is easy to forget what your body **DOES** do for you. I know I need to get back to focusing on this; do you? Even if chronic illness or disability does not impact your life, it is important to remember the great things your body lets you do and to not dwell on the things you wish it did do for you. Does your body let you breathe? Does it let you see, hear, smell, taste or feel the world around you? Does it let you connect with the body and mind of someone else, whether that be in an embrace, a meaningful look or being near them as you get to know the way they tick? Does it let you dream and plan for things ahead in your life? Does it let you laugh, does it let you cry, does it let you release your anger and your pain?

Everyone, healthy or not so healthy, comes to a time in their life when they realise there are some things their body and mind will never do. Maybe you will never swing upside down on a trapeze. Maybe you'll never sing on a stage in front of an audience stunned by your talent. Maybe you'll never master algebra. Maybe you'll never write a prize-winning novel. This can be a sad realisation – a reminder that life is short and we can't do everything. But it can also be a time to see ourselves as a *unique individual* who is able to do something in a way that no one else will ever do. We all put our own stamp on everything that we do.

Today, Valentine's Day (and everyday), think of the special

things you do. The things that make you **you**. Alongside being appreciative of every person in your life that contribute to this and showing your love towards them, show that same appreciation and love towards yourself. You don’t have to dip your own strawberries in chocolate and take yourself out to dinner (but then, why not?). Think about what you’d say to yourself in a gooey love letter. Look at your body and thank it for physically enabling you to be you. Look inside yourself and thank your mind, your personality and your inner essence for allowing yourself to be a very special individual.

Say to *yourself,* **“I love you.”**

