



Find your party confidence!

Dig that invitation out of the bin... Here's how to tackle your party worries, so nothing holds you back from having the good time you deserve

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Parties are supposed to be a treat, aren't they? The truth is, when you're self-conscious about your size, they sometimes feel more like an ordeal. You know it's supposed to be a chance to enjoy yourself, and instead it sets off a whole load of worries: 'What will I wear? Will I be the biggest person in the room? What if everyone stares at me? Or no one talks to me?' It's no wonder that often, as the event gets nearer, the urge to opt for an evening in gets stronger!

The trouble is, sometimes we put enjoying ourselves on hold indefinitely,

says hypnotherapist Lisa Jackson (www.qmhypnotherapy.co.uk). 'I call it the "I'll do it when I'm slim syndrome" – postponing doing things when you're not happy with your weight, promising yourself that one day, when you're slimmer, you'll get out there and be the life and soul of the party,' she says. 'Just because you're not happy with your size right now doesn't mean you can't start living your life to the full right this very second.' With a few confidence-boosting strategies, you can relax and enjoy yourself wherever you are on your weight-loss journey.

PARTY PANIC #1 'There's a party I can't get out of!'

The bigger the occasion, the bigger the anticipation – and for some of us, that means party stress, especially if it's a work event, or a party where you won't know many people. While making an excuse not to go may make you feel better initially, it could actually mean you feel worse in the long-term, says psychologist Dr Rob Yeung, author of *Confidence: Transform the Way You Feel So You Can Achieve the Things You Want* (Pearson, £8.99). 'Pushing your

boundaries and proving to yourself that you can survive – and even enjoy – a scary situation is incredibly confidence-building,' he says.

PARTY PLAN: Treat the event as an experiment using a tried-and-tested technique that can help give you a sense of perspective. Before the party, rate on a scale of one to 10 how uncomfortable you think it's going to feel, with one being 'completely fine' and 10 being 'completely terrifying'. Write down that rating somewhere private, then go to the party to test the accuracy of your prediction. When you get home, rate the experience from one to 10 again and compare the numbers. Chances are the second one will be much lower than the first. 'Every time you do something that challenges (and scares!) you, you're expanding your comfort zone, which will give you the courage to tackle bigger challenges,' says Rob.

PARTY PANIC #2 'Help! I've got nothing to wear'

Tempting as it may be to throw on your trusty tunic top and leggings, making an effort to dress up can have a powerful effect on your mood – and there's research to prove it. A recent study by Professor Karen Pine at the University of Hertfordshire found that people who wore the same 10 per cent or less of their wardrobe were more likely to suffer from low mood than those who wore their 'best' clothes on a regular basis. 'We found that women felt generally more upbeat when they wore a flattering dress than when they dressed in jeans and a baggy top,' Karen says.

PARTY PLAN: Choose clothes that emphasise your best bits. The golden rule for looking fabulous is to focus on the parts you like most, rather than on hiding what you're not so happy with, says stylist and blogger Tanesha Awasthi (GirlwithCurves.com). 'Stepping slightly out of your comfort zone, and wearing something you never thought you could, can be a revelation when you get positive feedback from those around you,' she says. So if you're proud of your smaller waist, try a fit-and-flare dress in a dark colour that skims over hips and thighs, worn with a wide belt. Or, if you love your cleavage, team

a low-necked top with an eye-catching, statement necklace and tailored trousers. And don't forget your party essential – a great pair of heels!

PARTY PANIC #3 'I'm dreading walking in the door...'

The first five minutes of any occasion often feel like the hardest – remember you won't be the only one who feels this way, says clinical psychologist Dr Mary Welford, author of *The Compassionate Mind Approach to Building Your Self Confidence* (Robinson, £15). 'It's easy to assume that everyone else at the party is super-confident, especially those who are slimmer. The truth is that everyone has their own worries and anxieties, whether it's about how they look, or about not having anything interesting to say.'

PARTY PLAN: Take a deep breath and turn up early. 'Although it feels counter-intuitive, walking into a room with just a handful of people is less intimidating than walking into one full of strangers with the conversations in full swing!' says Rob Yeung. 'And changing your body language has been proven to change the way you feel, too. According to a Harvard University study, pulling yourself up tall and adopting a confident posture triggers a release of testosterone and cortisol in men and women, which is like getting a shot of both energy and confidence.'

A glass of wine is great for relaxing, but there are Syn-free tactics, too. Think of something from the past that made you smile or laugh, says Stephanie Davies, who's a stand-up comedian and author

of *Laughology – Improve Your Life With the Science of Laughter* (Crown House, £12.99). 'It will change your thoughts and feelings, which impacts on your body language, so you'll come across as more relaxed and confident.'

Rob agrees. 'Warmth and smiles are contagious. We all have "mirror neurons" in the brain that make us match people we talk to – so be open, friendly and interested and, the chances are, that's what you'll get back,' he says.

PARTY PANIC #4 'I did it – but how did it go?'

It's the morning after and you think it went OK, but you can't help wondering whether your outfit worked, people liked you, or you said the right thing. The human brain has evolved with a 'better safe than sorry' mindset, says Mary Welford, meaning negative thoughts tend to overshadow the good stuff. So when you're running through your mental 'edited highlights', you may find you focus on bits that make you cringe.

POST-PARTY PLAN: Give yourself a pat on the back. 'You overcame your fear of going into a situation where you felt you were going to be judged by others,' says Mary. 'And even if you think it could have gone better, remember that messing up at times is what makes people likeable.' So, instead of picking your behaviour apart, focus on what went well, and what you learned from the experience – you can keep a conversation going with strangers and you can hit the dancefloor feeling good. Now, bring on the next party!



