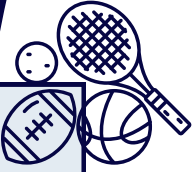


JOYFUL MOVEMENT



What messages do we get about movement?

We're often told that we need to do a certain amount or type of physical activity to be healthy. We're also told that being "healthy" means being "thin" or "lean". So, a lot of people think about physical activity as a way to make our bodies smaller, or more toned and/or muscular.

What can this lead to?

- A focus on achieving weight and appearance goals, instead of enjoying movement
- Movement becoming something you feel like you have to do to, not something you want to do
- The development of exercise or eating behaviours that hurt our health

How can you tell that your relationship with movement might need healing? *

- Do you feel like exercise "doesn't count" unless it's a certain intensity, or length of time?
- Do you feel distressed or guilty if your exercise plans are interrupted?
- Do you exercise in secret?
- Do you require exercise to be done according to rigid rules?
- Do you miss social events due to exercise plans?
- Do you exercise when you're sick, injured, or have been advised to rest?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, your thoughts and behaviours involving physical activity may be negatively affecting your wellbeing.

*This list is adapted with permission from Rachael Hartley, author of Gentle Nutrition

What is the goal of this resource?

Movement can be helpful for a lot of reasons that have nothing to do with weight or appearance, and health cannot be defined by body size. Therefore, the goal of this resource is to encourage you to **check in with your body, reflect on what may be best for you, and explore different ways of thinking about movement.**

More specifically, this resource encourages **joyful movement** and offers some practical tips for changing your physical activity patterns if they are currently rigid or rule based.

Note

If you have an eating disorder or are in recovery, we strongly suggest that you **speak with your health care team** to determine whether this resource will be helpful for you.



WHAT IS JOYFUL MOVEMENT?

Joyful movement is physical activity that you find fun — and maybe look forward to!
The following are key characteristics of joyful movement:

Choice, flexibility and intuition

- **Doing physical activity is your choice:** You have the freedom to choose, based on your values, what types of activity you would like to do, for how long, and when to take a break
- **Listening to your body and practicing flexibility:** You can adjust your movement choices based on how you feel physically and mentally that day, this helps to make movement more enjoyable — it also reduces the risk of injury!
- **Paying attention to your body's signals and responding using your intuition:** Our bodies provide important information about their needs through signals such as changes in how we feel and what we're thinking. Using your intuition means paying attention to what is happening both physically (e.g. changes in energy levels, muscle soreness/stiffness, injury, having a cold) and mentally (e.g., motivation, thoughts around physical activity, changes in mood or stress levels), and making decisions that align with your body's needs (e.g., resting, engaging in specific types of movement, adjusting your exercise plans). It might take some time to figure out what feels good and what doesn't, but regularly checking in with yourself can help you become more aware

Being flexible with your choices and listening to your body's cues are an important **foundation** for being able to start to enjoy movement.

Pleasure and celebration

- Finding **pleasure** in movement: Different forms of physical activity will be fun for different people. Figuring out the types of movement you truly enjoy might take some experimentation; if it does, be gentle with yourself
- Listening to your body, being flexible in your choices, and finding ways to enjoy movement make it easier to see physical activity as a **celebration** of your body instead of a means to change it

If you're working on improving your relationship with movement, your goal doesn't necessarily have to be to enjoy all the physical activity that you engage in. There are some scenarios where physical activity may not be fun... for example, have you ever needed to do physiotherapy exercises after an injury? In cases like these, physical activity might be more about taking care of your body than having fun. Keep in mind that joyful movement isn't about engaging in physical activity "perfectly"!

HOW TO EMBRACE JOYFUL MOVEMENT

Getting enough food, hydration, and rest is foundational — it's hard to move joyfully when your body and mind aren't getting what they need! While physical activity has a lot of potential benefits, many of these are lost when you are not properly nourished, hydrated, and rested. We strongly recommend working with a health professional to determine your individual needs. One option for seeking professional help is to connect with FREEDcan services if they are available in your area.

When you have a solid foundation to build upon, consider the following ideas. You could choose one or two to test out as a starting point.

Choose reasons for physical activity that don't involve changing how you look

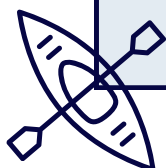
A few of the many ways in which physical activity can be helpful include improving mood, energy levels, quality of sleep, focus and memory; promoting relaxation, building strength, reducing pain and muscle stiffness, and strengthening your immune system

Experiment! Try new activities and find ones that are fun and make you feel good

- There are **many to choose from!** Dancing, martial arts, going for a bike ride, yoga, hiking, rock climbing, dog walking, swimming, kayaking, yard work, team sports, etc.
- Keep in mind that what worked for you in the past might not work for you today — your priorities, interests, schedule, budget, transportation options, and health will change over time

Move away from rigid exercise schedules

- We move our bodies in different ways throughout the day. **Movement can be thought of on a continuum** ranging from everyday activities such as tidying the house to more intense and structured activities — thinking about movement in this way can **help you avoid an all-or-nothing mindset**
- Some structure may be helpful (e.g. setting aside some time for physical activity each week) but a rigid schedule can make it harder to listen to your body
- If you do set aside time for physical activity, it's okay to take the day off or do something different if you're tired, sick, injured, busy, or just don't feel like moving
- **Be mindful of 'fitspiration' and fitness tracker apps** — these often don't focus on "joyful movement". See the FREEDcan social media and apps guide for more information



Tune into physical sensations and listen to your body

- Pay attention to **what is happening outside of your body** (what you can see, hear, smell, or feel), and **what is happening inside your body** (your heart beat and breath, the position of your body, the sensation of your feet on the ground, etc.)
- Realistically, it might be difficult to do this all the time, but you can pick a few moments during an activity to check in. For example, pause briefly during your activity and pay attention to physical sensations such as muscle tension or fatigue before deciding whether to continue

Find a buddy

- Some people find it helpful to recruit a buddy that they feel comfortable with. This can make physical activity more fun and may help take your mind off of thoughts about weight and appearance
- Consider **sharing this resource** with your buddy so that they're aware of how you're trying to approach physical activity

The "Talk Test"

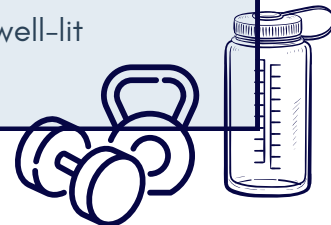
The **"talk test"** can be a valuable method for ensuring exercise intensity remains appropriate. If you can comfortably converse while exercising, you are likely maintaining a low-moderate intensity. This technique can make physical activity more enjoyable and sustainable. However, it is important to acknowledge that engaging in more intense exercise should not be discouraged if it is enjoyable and conducted safely

Limit comparisons

- Remember that everyone has their own relationship with physical activity – and this can also change over time
- **Behaviours that are healthy for one person may be unhealthy for another – and what is healthy for you at one moment might not be at another**
- Limiting comparison and making choices that reflect what is best for you at this point in your life can help you take care of your own body

Find exercise environments where you feel comfortable and safe

Whether it is harassment and catcalling on the street or receiving negative comments about your body at the gym, feeling unsafe will make any movement feel stressful rather than enjoyable. As mentioned by Rachael Hartley, author of *Gentle Nutrition*, it's important to **"consider what you need to do to feel safe**, whether that means running in a well-lit neighborhood, finding a more inclusive space to work out, [or finding a] buddy".



Who can you rely on to support this process?

You don't have to do this alone. Consider sharing this resource with a trusted health care provider, such as an eating disorder therapist or dietitian, so that you can talk through the points together and adjust the suggestions to match your needs.

You may also find it helpful to share the resource with coaches, family members or friends so that they know your goals and can help support you in this process.

The development of this resource was led by Isla Edmonds in collaboration with youth advisors and staff from FREEDcan. Elements of this resource have been informed and inspired by several sources. If interested, please reach out to freedcan@cheo.on.ca to learn more about how this resource was created.

We recommend **NEDIC (National Eating Disorder Information Centre)** www.nedic.ca as an additional source of information and support for those experiencing eating disorders and their supporters.



Contact

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