

Intuitive Exercise

You may have heard of the practice of Intuitive Eating, but what about Intuitive Exercise? It is important to listen to our body and practice mindfulness when it comes to food, and it is equally important to listen to our body when it comes to physical activity. In fact, the ninth principle of Intuitive Eating focuses on the importance of Intuitive Exercise.

What is Intuitive Exercise?

We all know that exercise has benefits for physical and mental health. It can create stronger bones, stronger muscles, improve circulation, strengthen the heart, improve flexibility, and release endorphins. Movement should be a part of our way of living, but it should never feel like a chore. For many people exercise feels like something they “should” or “need” to do. Often it may feel this way because the intention behind exercising is body focused. When we begin to practice moving intuitively, our focus shifts.

The practice of intuitive exercise allows us to connect with our body and discover what type of movement it needs. This could be a different type of movement every day. Some days, you may feel like you have more energy than others. Maybe on these days you try a new workout class or engage in cardio. On days when you feel stronger and more powerful, you may do some weightlifting. On days when your body is sore and tired, maybe you just do some gentle stretching in the morning. No movement is right or wrong when it comes to intuitive exercise, it all depends on your body.

How Do I Begin Exercising Intuitively?

1. **Check in with your body.** Before engaging in exercise, check in with your energy levels. How is your mood? Are you adequately fueled? Are you hydrated? Are there any areas of your body that feel particularly sore or tired? All these questions can help you determine what kind of movement your body needs. These are also great questions to ask after movement to determine if that movement was beneficial to you or not. Typically, you should feel more empowered, and have an increase in energy after a workout, rather than feeling drained and fatigued.
2. **Practice mindfulness.** What is your motivation to engage in movement? If your main focus is to change your body in any way or to “burn off” or “earn” food, then you may need to reevaluate. Instead focus on the health benefits the movement can have and how it could improve your mood. Exercise should be something you enjoy and should never feel forced.
3. **Take rest days.** Our bodies need adequate rest to repair and restore our muscles. Allowing ourselves to take rest days when we are tired and don’t want to engage in physical activity, we begin to build trust with our bodies. This will translate into several aspects of our relationship with ourselves and can improve our physical and mental well-being.
4. **Find movement you enjoy.** Think back to when you were a kid. Did you enjoy any sports? Play any games with friends? Bringing the social aspect into movement and having fun with the people you love can be a great way to find activities that bring you joy. When we find a movement we enjoy, we are more likely to stick with it. Don’t be afraid to branch out and try new things. There are so many different activities to engage in, you never know what could spark your interest.

Examples of Movement and Exercise

Walking

Skateboarding
Roller skating
Hiking
Gardening
Yoga
Dancing
Swimming
Jumping on the Trampoline
Rowing
Tennis
Soccer
Volleyball
Basketball
Baseball
Softball
Aerobics
Hula hooping
Paddle boarding
Surfing
Ice skating
Golf
Pickleball
Racquetball
Jump Rope

The list goes on and on. Remember, we will all have different capabilities and movement we enjoy. Find what feels good to you and your body without any judgment or comparison.