Add Some Mindfulness to Your Movement

Are you struggling to fit physical activity into your routine? Try a different approach, and be mindful about your movement.

It’s no secret that engaging in regular physical activity offers a number of health benefits — from decreasing the risk
of developing chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer, to promoting better sleep and improving mental health. Yet according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), around four out of five adults in America fall short of weekly physical activity recommendations (CDC, 2015a; CDC, 2014).

Both the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend that adults between the ages of 18-64 aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate level activity. This includes brisk walking, mowing the lawn with a push mower, water aerobics, or riding a bicycle on flat terrain; or 75 minutes of vigorous level activity, such as playing sports (i.e., tennis or soccer), jogging, riding a bicycle on a path with inclines, or hiking (CDC, 2015b; WHO, n.d.). Additionally, adults should incorporate two strength training sessions per week targeting all major muscle groups (CDC, 2015b; WHO, n.d.).

People often have a desire to be more physically active, but there are many barriers that can get in the way. A survey given to adult women found that lack of time, fatigue/lack of energy, no one to exercise with, lack of a place to exercise, pain/discomfort, and lack of motivation, were all barriers to engaging in physical activity (Adachi-Mejia & Schifferdecker, 2016). In order to reap all the health benefits exercise has to offer, finding ways to overcome barriers and increase physical activity levels is essential. However, the way we approach exercise may also have a significant impact on health (Calogero & Pedrotty, 2007). According to Calogero and Pedrotty (2007), mindless physical activity involves exercising solely for the intent to lose weight or change body shape, adhering to a rigid exercise schedule with no flexibility, and/or exercising to compensate for calories
eaten. This type of exercise promotes a disconnection from the body and how it feels and it may involve continuing to exercise when sick or injured or in extreme weather conditions (Calogero & Pedrotty, 2007; Tribole & Resch, 2017). This type of exercise may promote disordered thinking patterns around exercise and eating, and it and may lead to injury (Calogero & Pedrotty, 2007).

In contrast, to encourage a healthy relationship with exercise, Calogero & Pedrotty (2007) and Tribole & Resch (2017) recommend mindful exercise, which involves paying attention to the process of engaging in physical activity and listening to your body, rather than focusing solely on the desired end result. This involves tuning into the physical sensations in your body as you are moving including your heart rate, breath, and the feeling of your muscles as they contract and relax (Tribole & Resch, 2017). Mindful physical activity has the following characteristics:

1. It revitalizes the body, rather than drains it of energy;
2. It allows you to connect with your body and its sensations so you can respond to them, instead of encouraging you to “push through” an activity that may cause discomfort;
3. It helps with managing stress, rather than contributing to it;
4. It is fun and enjoyable, which makes you want to continue (Calogero & Pedrotty, 2007; Tribole & Resch, 2017).

A critical step to becoming more physically active is finding enjoyable physical activities. A systematic review of several studies found that people who reported enjoyment during
exercise were more likely to engage in exercise in the future (Rhodes & Kates, 2015). Additionally, thinking outside of the box and recognizing that physical activity does not have to be done at a gym or on sports team, may be useful. The World Health Organization acknowledges leisure activities that involve movement such as dancing and gardening, household tasks such as mowing the lawn, and play with children or pets as movement that contributes to total physical activity (WHO, n.d.). Additionally, activity can occur in a large chunk of time or it can be spread out in small increments (i.e., 10 minutes at a time, four times per day) (WHO, n.d.).

Still not sure where to begin? Tribole and Resch (2017) recommend taking time to think through the environment and types of activities that would be most enjoyable to you. Here are some questions to ask yourself (Tribole & Resch, 2017):

1. Would I rather exercise alone or in a group?
2. Do I prefer to be outdoors or indoors?
3. What would I enjoy doing that is realistic given my current level of fitness?
4. Do I want to choose an activity that makes me feel more relaxed or energetic after I finish?
5. Is there a new activity I am interested in, but haven’t tried before?
6. How can I see physical activity as part of my self-care routine?
7. What is the best time to fit exercise in my schedule?

Note: People with certain chronic health conditions should check with their doctor prior to beginning a physical activity routine (CDC, 2015a).
This article was written by Brittany Bingeman. Brittany studied family and consumer sciences and nutrition/dietetics and she is passionate about health and wellness with a holistic approach. She enjoys teaching about mindful and intuitive eating to help people improve their relationship with food as well as other important family and life skills. Originally from Georgia, she enjoys spending time exploring beautiful southern Utah and the western states. She enjoys spending time with her husband, cooking, reading, listening to podcasts, hiking, jogging, and yoga. Brittany can be reached at brittany.bingeman@usu.edu or 435-634-5706.

References


