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Using Exercise As Self-Care Not Punishment

We all know about the benefits of exercise. Exercise always comes up when talking with anyone about self-care, be it a doctor, our therapist or just a friend.

The truth is that exercise is one of the most important things we can do for self-care.

It can help with

- Depression
- Pain
- Bone Density
- Immune System Function
- Strength
- Physical and Emotional Resilience
- Insulin Sensitivity
- Social Support
- Self-Confidence
- a heck of a lot more.

The problems occur when people don't use it right.

It's important to remember that exercise is just a tool, like a hammer or a baking sheet. Hammers are great, but if you're using one to make cookies they're probably won't taste very good.

Exercise is the same way. You've got to use it right to get the benefits you want.

Here are 2 ways exercise can hurt your self-care and how to make sure you don't fall into those traps.

1. Using exercise to lose weight.

This is wrong in so many ways I don't have the time to go into all of them.

Did you notice in the list above I didn't include weight loss as a benefit to exercise?

That's because it isn't.

Let's dig in.

When you exercise just to lose weight you see exercise as a punishment, not as something healthy.

Add that to the fact that exercise itself just doesn't burn all that many calories (despite what you've been told) and you experience something I like to call the "What-The-Heck-Am-I-Doing-This-For" syndrome.

That happens when you realize all your hard work isn't doing much, so you stop.

How do you fix this issue?

Look to exercise as something that can help in a host of ways (see the list above), just not this one.

2. You aren't doing things you enjoy.

One sure fire way to hurt your self-care is to "should" yourself.

What does that mean? You start telling yourself all the things you “should” be doing. As in:

I SHOULD be doing this type of exercise 5 days a week for 90 minutes each day so hard I wind up in the fetal position in a pool of sweat because that trainer on TV told me to.

Some people do like to exercise like that, but some don't. Remember that the most important thing you can get out of a workout is the desire for another one. Pushing yourself in an unsustainable way means you just aren't going to want to do it for very long. That's not going to help you.

Remember this:

One of the most important aspects of self-care is getting out of the trap of taking what you want *RIGHT NOW* instead of what you want *MOST*.

A week of crazy workouts is never going to outweigh months of more appropriate ones.

How do you fix this issue?

Do things you enjoy, or at very least don't hate. Whether it's strength training, running, yoga or anything else, you're more likely to continue doing something you like. Makes sense, huh?

The key to both of these examples is to make sure you're approaching exercise in a positive way. Focus on positive and realistic goals and a positive and realistic way to achieve them.

Take care!

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