



The Power of Taking a Break from Exercise



THE
POWER IN MOTION
PODCAST

Episode 104

[00:00:00] Hey, and welcome back to the power in motion podcast. On today's episode, I want to talk about some reasons why you might actually want to, or need to take a break from working out, which I know is totally counterintuitive and probably not what you'll hear from pretty much anyone in the fitness industry or health and wellness.

[00:00:21] But bear with me because I think for some people at some times, Taking a full stop from exercise when done with the right intentions can be the most powerful way to create a sustainable and enjoyable movement practice. Now I want to be clear this isn't just about throwing our hands in the air and giving up on exercise forever. I would never say that. Movement matters. Humans need movement. You need to move. And you will, again, I promise.

[00:00:51] What I'm talking about here is an intentional pause. To reevaluate your relationship with movement to change how you think about exercise and to reconnect with your body and learn how to listen to its internal cravings for movement.

[00:01:06] If you happened to catch last week's episode with Liz Togerson, she's a weight neutral style consultant. It was an awesome episode. If you did miss it, you should definitely go back and listen to it. But you would have noticed at the end, as I was coaching her on her relationship with exercise, this is exactly what

I recommended to her. And it's something that I did myself and I've recommended to other clients too, along the way.

[00:01:31] So today I'm going to share some reasons why I would recommend a full stop with exercise. What that would look like and how to make the best use out of this time and how taking this time away from structured exercise actually can help you be more consistent in the long run. So that you can identify if doing this for yourself would be helpful.

[00:01:54] So let's start by digging in and ask why? In what situations would I recommend that you take a full exercise stop? Basically, if you're using exercise purely to burn calories, earn or burn food, or purely for the aesthetic benefit that the exercise might have, I would recommend taking a full stop.

[00:02:18] So that could look like. If you feel like you have to work out. Or if you feel like you're not doing enough or that what you're doing doesn't count, or you should be doing more. If you dread going to the gym or consistently struggle with motivation and have to rely on willpower or rewards to get going. If you choose your activity or workout of the day based on how many calories it burns or how it might make you look. If you work out intensely, no matter how you feel, because you need to burn the calories or you need to show up.

[00:02:54] If you track your food intake and your exercise and base your workouts on how much you ate. If you think only about how a certain activity will shape your body. If you push yourself to injury or push through injury instead of resting, or if getting injured and not being able to work out causes you extreme anxiety or fear of weight gain.

[00:03:15] Or, maybe you've already stopped exercising for calorie burning only, and you've embraced the non diet lifestyle, but you struggle with motivation or wanting to exercise because it reminds you of your dieting days and stirs up feelings of dread. Which can I just say, is very normal because the body and your primitive brain that's focused on your survival and your pleasure has a memory of how you used to engage with exercise. It remembers how you used to push yourself, how you just did, what you felt you had to do without listening to how your body was feeling.

[00:03:51] The reason you now feel so resistant exercise is because this way of working out feels threatening to your body and brain. When you've stopped dieting and begun intuitive eating, you've started the process of respecting your body and making food choices from a place of self care. But if you haven't specifically addressed your relationship with exercise and gotten to a neutral,

respectful place with it, then working out can feel like dieting or restriction punishment to your brain, even if that's not your intention.

[00:04:24] So if you're already in a period of low to no activity, just stop judging yourself and saying you should get back at it. I want to encourage you to embrace this messy middle and follow the same recommendations I'm about to make to the folks who I recommend taking a full stop from exercise.

[00:04:44] And I want to just say that I have gone through this process myself. I did this exact process when I first embraced the non diet lifestyle and I kind of figured it all out by myself as I was healing my relationship with food and body. Where I was like, if I'm not going to restrict food anymore and I'm not going to try to force my body to be a certain size. And I'm not going to think about any food as good or bad or healthy or unhealthy, but rather I'm going to learn to trust my body, to let me know what it needs. Then why am I exercising in such a punitive way? Perhaps the same is true for movement. That all movement is good movement and my body can let me know what it needs in terms of exercise too.

[00:05:28] Now for me, it was a bit of a messy process because I was just figuring it all out for myself. But I can tell you that on the other side of this messy journey, I have a much more consistent, peaceful and enjoyable routine with exercise. I never worry if I've done enough. I don't track. I don't strictly plan my workouts, although I am intentional and I have a program I'm just really flexible in how I implement it. And I'm a lot more in tune with my body.

[00:05:57] So, let me talk you through what this process looks like. Okay, so you've decided to take a break. So you've decided that taking a break might benefit you, but we're going to use this time intentionally to heal your relationship with movement so that you can return to it with lots of motivation and a clean mindset.

[00:06:17] So the first step of the process is to make a commitment, to not do any activity if the only reason you're doing it is to burn calories and or shape your body. Or if it doesn't feel like it feeds your soul in some way, just don't.

[00:06:33] For me when I first started this process, I did a lot of walking in nature or by the water and a bit of yoga because I liked how it cleared my head and kept me from feeling totally stiff and sore. I did teach some fitness classes, but most of my classes looked like me coaching and moving around the room and less participating.

[00:06:51] And other than that, I only did things that felt good. And I chose not to worry about whether I was doing enough.

[00:06:58] Which leads into step two. In order to not worry about whether you're doing enough, you need to reframe how you think about exercise. You got to challenge the belief that exercise needs to look a certain way to be right or enough.

[00:07:12] We've been taught that exercise needs to take place in a gym or at least look like a workout to count. That you need to lift weights or run, that it needs to be 30 minutes or more, and you need to sweat or be sore after. But that's just all made up fitspo stuff. Gyms never even existed until about 70 years ago. There are a zillion ways to move and they're all good.

[00:07:36] A short walk outside, gets your circulation going, clears your mind and offers you some fresh air. 10 minutes of stretching can relieve sore and tight muscles and improve your mobility. So I want you to notice how you're currently thinking about movement. Like you can get out a piece of paper and jot down all of your beliefs that you hold about exercise.

[00:07:56] And notice the all or nothing mindset and notice how many of your current thoughts about exercise are rooted in a belief that the main point of movement is to lose weight or shape your body.

[00:08:09] And then I want you to start thinking differently. Start to think about how even micro doses of movement are benefiting you.

[00:08:17] Like even right now, if you straighten up in your chair and fix your posture, roll your shoulders back and down that tiny little movement benefits you. So intentionally thinking about how every little movement benefits your body is going to get you thinking beyond weight loss and body shaping and into the functional movement.

[00:08:40] And as you start doing that, start to become curious and think about why else would I move? If it weren't about losing weight or Toning up. Why would I do it? And maybe you don't have an answer for that just yet. That's entirely normal when you've been programmed to think about exercise as a way to lose weight for so many years.

[00:09:03] But this is exactly why we're taking this break. So that you can give your body time to communicate to you why it would want to move.

[00:09:13] So that's the third step of this process is to tune into your body and to your internal movement cravings. As you're in this period of inactivity, use this time to be in your body, more, feeling your body and notice all the tiny ways that your body asks for movement and do your best to respond.

[00:09:33] If you've ever practiced, intuitive eating, then you know, the process of reconnecting to your hunger and fullness cues. You slow down, you scan your body at several times during the day and tune into how you're feeling. And let those feelings inform how much to eat and when to stop. It's the exact same process with movement.

[00:09:53] When you're first learning this I'd recommend setting an alarm for two to three times a day where you stop what you're doing. Check in with your body. Notice the sensations that you're currently feeling. And ask, what do I need? And then meet that need to the best of your ability in that moment, whether it's to stand up and take a little walk, do a little stretch, grab a glass of water, or just shift and fidget in your chair to feel more comfortable.

[00:10:23] We start this at a really micro level, because it builds trust with your body, that you can hear its signals and that you will respond. And the more you take those tiny little shifts and stretches, the more your body's going to start communicating with you. I call these communications from your body movement cravings. And though there's absolutely no research around this. Maybe someday I get around to doing that. I truly believe that just as your body can tell you when it's hungry for food and what type and amount of food it's hungry for. It can tell you what it wants for movement, what type it needs, the intensity and duration. You just have to learn how to listen. And what you'll notice with time and intentional practice with this is eventually your body's going to start asking for more intense or different types of movement.

[00:11:14] So for me when I went through this process, I didn't run or lift a weight for several months. Absolutely no hit training and that's something my body really still does not enjoy to be honest. But eventually I noticed I started to feel achy. I noticed that I was getting out of breath with simple activities. I didn't have the strength or stamina I used to have and my back was starting to hurt more.

[00:11:37] So, yeah, I got out of shape and I also did gain some weight, although not everybody does when they do this process. But I was very intentional about not being hard on myself about that, or make it mean anything bad about me. Which as a side note, it's very helpful if you've reached a place of body neutrality before you begin this process. If negative body image and fear

of weight gain prevents you from taking an exercise break, you're going to want to backtrack and start there.

[00:12:05] And I can point you towards the five day training that I've linked in my show notes of this episode. It's called how to feel great in and about your body, no matter what the scale says. There's a module in there on body acceptance. As well as ones about food and movement and weight neutral health.

[00:12:22] So if you're in this place of not doing much activity and feeling so-called lazy and out of shape, or you worry about getting to this place. Let me reframe that by saying you're exactly where you need to be. This feeling is a really important part of the process of changing your whole outlook on exercise. Getting to this place, a feeling out of shape helped me discover my why. Why I should move. If not for calorie burning and body shaping, this became crystal clear to me as my fitness deteriorated.

[00:12:57] I realized I wanted to feel strong. I wanted to be able to carry the laundry up the stairs without getting winded. I wanted to be able to hike without feeling incapacitated the next day. I wanted to feel mobile and mostly free from pain. This out of shape feeling was my body letting me know that it wanted more intentional, consistent and intense training.

[00:13:18] I knew I needed to add in some more cardiovascular and strength training to feel the way I wanted to feel in my body. That's when I knew I was ready to get back to structured intentional workouts and your body will communicate this with you too. It's just really important not to judge yourself and make this out of shape feeling mean you've done something wrong or that you're bad for letting yourself get to this place.

[00:13:44] Taking this full stop, changing your mindset about exercise and tuning into your movement cravings opens the door for your body to let you know how and why it wants to move.

[00:13:56] But here's, what's different as you go through this process with intention and keep a really neutral mindset about all of this. As you re-engage with movement this time, you're no longer going to worry about whether you're doing enough or doing it right. You'll know what type and amount of movement you need.

[00:14:14] You'll know whether you want to go back to the gym or follow a class or other workout, but you'll also know that you have tons of other options.

If that's not your jam. You'll know when to push yourself and when to pull back modify or rest. You will never worry if you miss a day or a week or maybe even a month because you'll trust that you'll get back to it because you're in tune with your movement cravings.

[00:14:38] You'll know, that consistency is really what you do over the course of your life. Not what you do in three months stints. And you're going to have a lot more fun and enjoy the process a whole lot more. There will be days where it's not exactly joyful, but you won't struggle with motivation like you did, and you definitely won't dread activity. It's going to feel a whole lot more neutral. Like just one of the things you do each day to take care of yourself, like brushing your teeth. Which to me is a win.

[00:15:07] I absolutely love working with personal training clients. Who've gone through this process because their training is so much more collaborative. When they show up to sessions, I mean, I have a loose plan, but they let me know what they're craving based on how they feel in their body. And we get to customize the workout based on that information. And they leave feeling like they got exactly what they need that day. It is so empowering and fun.

[00:15:30] So I hope that you found this helpful today and that what I've shared here helps you think differently about yourself if you're in a period of inactivity or gives you the permission you might need to take that break. Until I see you next week. I want to encourage you to ponder. Why would I exercise if not for body shaping or weight loss? And see what you come up with.

[00:15:50] And I'm always here for you. If you're stuck somewhere in this process, or if you want to start the process, but you need support, just reach out via email or social media, and we can talk about how coaching could help you. I will see you on the next episode.