

**UFYB 272: Why Exercise Isn't Always "Good":
A Conversation with Deb Malkin, Jill Angie,
and Sarah Shiozawa**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*, the only podcast that teaches you how to use psychology, feminism, and coaching, to rewire your brain and get what you want in life. And now here's your host, Harvard Law School grad, feminist rockstar, and master coach, Kara Loewentheil.

Hello, my chickens, I am really looking forward to this conversation we're about to have today because I think it's something that probably some of you have thought about a lot. And then probably some of you are going to be like, "What are you talking about", when you hear this today because we are going to be talking about sort of an aspect of society, and health, and especially wellness culture that sort of gets universally lionized and praised. And why that's maybe not such a good idea or such a good thing.

So that was weirdly evasive given that the title of this episode, so that's what it's about. But we're going to be talking about exercise. I'm here with three of my incredible students from the Advanced Certification in Feminist Coaching who are amazing coaches, Deb, Sarah and Jill. And they're going to tell you all about who they are and what they do because they'll do a better job of it than I will. So let's just do that first and then we'll start to dive into this topic. Deb, do you want to start us off?

Deb: Sure. Hi, I'm Deb Malkin. And I am a feminist life coach. And I coach on chronic pain and conditions, and also general life stuff. And I kind of came through this work as a body positive fat activist body worker, movement specialist and general rebellious human who doesn't like other people to tell me what is true about my body. So coaching on chronic pain is so interesting because it's so much about the intersection between our physical reality and our beliefs about them. And so this work is so deeply rooted in this mythology around exercise so I'm excited to have this conversation. Thanks.

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Kara: Nice. Jill, what about you?

Jill: Hi, my name's Jill Angie and I am a fat feminist runner. And I'm also a certified running coach. And what I do is help fat women start running so that they can feel more confident in their bodies, more confident in their lives and also fuck the patriarchy.

Kara: It's much easier to fight the patriarchy when you can run far and have better stamina. And that's why I love, I mean having you here in this conversation. I think you're someone people would assume would just be like, "Exercise is amazing and everybody should do it." And it's only ever a good thing as a running coach. So I'm excited for your perspective on this. Sarah, and what about you?

Sarah: Yes. So I am Sarah Shiozawa and I'm a feminist leadership coach. And primarily I work with leaders in corporate, in government and it's upleveling leadership confidence. But my leaders have a tremendous amount of burnout, overwhelm. And the intersectional feminism has been extremely important for coaching every single unique client and where they come from. And then also with their teams, they have more diverse teams, understanding the individuals where they're coming from. So helping leaders when the leader is coached, that's been one of the goals.

But this work specifically has been my own personal work which are my first clients at the end of the day.

Kara: And so how did you kind of come to this topic as well since it's a little bit less straight in your niche than Deb and Jill?

Sarah: Yes. Well, it was from the riding, Deb and I had just some really great conversations. But because of the morality associated with buffering

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and specifically there was an example of alcohol and overexercising. And sitting with that because for whatever reason I had had this idea that drugs, or alcohol, or whatever is a bad buffer. And exercise is a more socially acceptable buffer. But at the end of the day they're all buffers.

Kara: Yeah. So Sarah comes at this more from, it's I think your personal kind of experience and also something, and I actually can't really see you but I have the impression you are not in a fat body. So a person in a kind of more mid-sized or straight sized body but who had this – I remember when we were going through the curriculum, and I remember you posting this being like, "Wait a minute, what are you talking about?" Obviously drinking and drugs are 'bad' and exercise is good. And so many of us have that assumption and that thought process.

So that's what we're really going to talk about today. And I think for those of you who – for some of you this podcast listeners is going to feel like a big relief. And then some of you are going to feel very challenged by it. And both of those are great and I encourage you to sit with whatever reaction you're having and be curious about it. But what we're really going to talk about is yes, both are sort of some of the positive benefits of intentionally moving your body. We have to even define what we mean by exercise. But also what is all the cultural messaging and baggage around it?

And how does it fit into the kind of variety of practices that I would just call self-regulation practice or ways that people try to regulate themselves and deal with their emotions and that kind of morality we have around this. So let's actually just start with, yeah, what are we talking about when we say exercise, I guess to me I think of basically sort of moving your body on purpose for some sort of additional purpose or benefit beyond just this feels good to do. But I'm curious how you guys define it.

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Deb: I'll jump in. In the past I would have said exercise is kind of intentional movement for a particular physiological purpose. And the problem with that is I just – I don't know if you heard of Dr. Alia Crum's study on the housekeepers. Her colleague described exercise as a placebo. And so the mindset of exercise is...

Kara: Wait. You've got to tell people what that study is.

Deb: So the study is there are these housekeepers that they followed and housekeeping is a physically taxing job. But the 84 women in this study didn't believe that they exercised. A whole number of them was like when they were asked, "Do you get any exercise?" Their answer was no. And so throughout the study the process was to not have them do any different physical labor or activities but to kind of tell them that the work that they are doing all day long from their job was exercise. And then their health markers changed.

They received the benefit, the positive benefit that we associate with exercise just from believing that they were exercising by doing their job. And so with that in mind...

Kara: Slow that down and say that again because I don't want people to hear that, so what happened was all that changed was that they were told, "Hey, did you know you are already exercising? This thing you do for a job is exercise." And then their health markers changed. So they got, the benefits we associate with exercise came at least in part, come at least in part from the way that we think about it and what we call it. Everybody just needs to really let that sit in their brains and not just be like, "An interesting fact I learned, let me move along." Really that's mind blowing.

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Deb: Yeah, it is true. It is deeply, deeply mind blowing. And so when I think about almost anything I believe now I start with what are the beliefs? Who's selling me these ideas? And what do I really want to believe about them? Because I think there's so much about health that we don't know because just believing you are exercising changes your health without changing anything you're doing physiologically is astounding. So it just shows that there's a lot of storytelling about health benefits or even about what health is. And so it's hard to unravel it.

And exercise is to me now kind of a mindset about your body. That's where I start with because when we think of it as the outcome, we're always left in this place of chasing something that we don't currently have. And that chasing of something external from us is like we're either chasing a feeling that we don't currently have or we're chasing some physiological symbol of health which is something that we've been kind of sold, that looks like health. And then of course we find out later, this person on Instagram looked great but they felt terrible.

And so we don't have in this country a not fat phobic, not racist, not ageist description of what health even is.

Kara: Or what exercise even is.

Deb: Or what exercise is.

Kara: Or what is enough exercise, yeah.

Deb: There's some kind of reasons for exercising, whatever that means to you.

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Kara: Whatever it means to you. How do you think about this Jill, what does that term mean to you?

Jill: Yeah I don't like the term, exercise because I feel like it's an attempt to put movement into sort of a box and also moralize it I guess. Because like you said, Deb, here are folks that are getting all of this movement in a day and they're like, "But I'm not getting any exercise." And I guess maybe by the technical definition of exercise, which is going out and doing some form of sport or walking, or something like that for a set period of time, I guess technically maybe they're not getting exercise. Which is why I don't really like that word in general. Because I think it just has kind of a weird connotation.

But if I had to define it, I think it is just movement of the body, period. It's something that you're doing that's not laying or sitting. I guess that's kind of what I would say.

Kara: Well, you could also do exercise of laying down. You could move your arms and move your legs and those would be your exercises.

Jill: Excellent point, yeah, alright. So maybe it's movement of your body, period, movement.

Kara: I think there's something about the intention. One person might go for an hour walk and be like, "I exercised today. I went for my walk, that was my exercise." Where somebody else is just like, "Yeah, I took a walk. That's not my exercise. I don't exercise at all or I do exercise and that's not exercise, that's just a walk." It's all what is your intention, what is your kind of thought process behind.

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Jill: I think it is and it's a very moralized term because we're told that we should exercise. And then if you're thinking, well exercise is this very narrow definition then you're missing out on all the stuff that you're doing. And to me, I'm more about, hey, let's just move because it feels good to move our bodies in whatever way we decide to do it. And yeah, it's just not my favorite word in general.

Kara: Yeah. What about you, Sarah, what has been your experience?

Sarah: Right, no. So I agree with Jill, that I think that the term is very eroded either way. And I just this past month, I'm a runner, I've ran long distance and it's just a habit. I literally just have to put on my shoes and I'm out the door. But developing different practices, I mean even something as simple as yoga, or Pilates. I mean it's literally just breathing. And so it's interesting because there's different practices and everybody is different. And what's fun for someone is completely different. But yeah, it's the movement, it's the intention.

And it's the boost in, I mean for me the reason why I move is because I do experience a mood boost. Even if it's just walking around the block. Now, whether that's a buffer. For me when I move my body it doesn't matter how, or why, or what, if it's dancing for one song, I always have a mood boost. And so that's what I think it is for me is just some type of movement.

Kara: Yeah. And I'm sure that the – I don't think that that housekeeper study which is just one study also means that there's no physiological impact from moving your body otherwise. It would be interesting to have a study that was people who don't physically move during the day at all. And if they think they exercise, what's the difference in their bodies. But I think that's part of what is so tricky about untangling all of this, is that it is so

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moralized. So people will always mostly self-report that exercise makes them feel good. And people who like to 'exercise', that's why they do it.

And I'm sure there are physiological things happening, your blood is moving, your lymph is moving, you're breathing more, whatever. And also there's the thought you have which is, oh, good, I exercise. I'm an okay good person today. I did the thing I'm supposed to do. It's just like with studies of dieters and dieting.

There was a study on, they talked about on Maintenance Phase recently that some of the health benefits people supposedly see from certain diets or intentional change of their food is actually coming from the effects of the belief that they have done something good for their health. Because it could happen with all different, you could be eating all meat or all vegetables. It's not coming from the food itself because the diets are all different.

It's coming from the change in your belief and your self-conception of okay, I did the good thing, I'm good, I'm in control, whatever your thoughts are around that. I don't think you can ever completely untangle those things.

Deb: No. But I think the process that's important is becoming aware why we're doing something and the benefit that we're seeking. When you become aware that you're feeling good about yourself because you're taking these actions then you can have a lot more choice in the actions that you take. It's not the activity that you're doing per se that's giving you the benefit. So that's where we can loosen up and have a lot more freedom.

And also just understand, are these thoughts, do I want to keep believing that I can earn my food by exercising or whatever, or think I'm a good person because I went for a run or went for a walk? Rather than enjoying, we don't even have to enjoy movement but I think it's better when we enjoy

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things. We can learn to enjoy things on purpose. So it's sometimes just practicing enjoying a walk, has health benefits that are greater than the distance that you walk.

Kara: But that can also be its own trap because as somebody who does have chronic pain and who doesn't love intentional exercise and how it feels. I feel like there is this almost discourse of naturalness around, well, bodies naturally want to move. And I'm like, well, yeah, but on a real range. Look at dogs. A greyhound wants to run and has been bred to run. And then a pug wants to sleep on the couch most of the day. There is a real range in what animals who presumably we think don't have these cultural paradigms, whether or how they want to run.

Or the sort of naturalness around you'll naturally know how much you want to eat to feel whatever. Have you ever seen a cat eat until it throws up? Because I have. And that's a natural thing it's doing. I think that there is this sort of part of current wellness culture is this idea that sort of, it's like people learn a little bit that socialization is a thing. And then the response to that is to sort of be like, "Well, if we can remove the socialization you will naturally gravitate towards eating a Mediterranean diet and weighing 125 pounds or something."

Which is that's not actually true, nature has a huge variety of shapes, and sizes, and energy levels, and diets. And animals do shit like eat fermented grass to get high and eat too much and puke sometimes, and not want to go for walks. And just there's this weird, it's almost like the 19th century romantic poetry movement of just like in the state of nature, we would like, everything would be beautiful. And then it's like, Wordsworth, have you ever been to an actual sheep farm? It's not actually just three beautifully washed sheep on a meadow.

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There's a lot of dirt, and muck, and confusion in the natural world. So this is a little tangent but I feel like it relates because I think that this – sometimes I feel like this discourse around your body naturally wants to move. You should just do what you enjoy is like, well, what about people who are like, "I don't enjoy any of this." Whether it's genetics and centuries of genetic breeding or just whatever. Some of us are like, "I'm pretty good on the couch actually, I don't really feel like." So this to me is part of what's fascinating about so what does that mean, this exercise?

And where does that benefit come from? Is it really physical movement that we're fetishizing, or is it really our mindset about it?

Sarah: Well, I think it's our society's obsession with productivity even. I mean for me because I've always been a runner, but I didn't have a productive day if I didn't go for a run. I base my productivity on that, getting that run in. And so I mean for many years I was like that. So it's just really interesting, what's baked in.

Kara: Yeah. How is that productive? The ways that we sweep anything into a moralizing term. If we decide that productive equals good then somehow food and exercise become productive even though actually they're consumptive or energy expending. You're actually not producing anything. But that's what happens when a word becomes just a code word for good or bad, then anything can go in there.

Deb: I mean we are producing the ability to stay alive.

Kara: Yes, that's true.

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Deb: Our own aliveness is maybe the point of our brain and our body doing stuff. So it is outside of productivity. Just the fact that we exist, we can decide that's enough.

Kara: I think that also the sort of exercise is always good, I feel like people listening to this are going to be like, so you're saying, nobody should ever exercise? Which is I'm saying not what any of us are saying. If you are happy with your movement practice then knock yourself out. But a lot of people are very stressed out about their movement practice whether they have one or not which is also the irony. Somebody who doesn't exercise may look at somebody who runs all the time and be like, "I bet they feel great about themselves and they love their movement."

And meanwhile they're like Sarah and if they miss a day then they shit on themselves. So it's not better there than here. But also you get the situation where I think people, I definitely know people who use exercise to manage their mood, to be able to cope. Jill just raised her hand so Jill should talk about this next. But I think, and I'm not saying that's bad, when that's done as a substitute for the coaching, or the therapy, or whatever else you need to get to know yourself it just is not – I think socially we're like, "Yes, that's good, that's what you should do to blow off steam."

But it's just if you don't change your thoughts, I have a member of my family who I feel is like this where they're so stressed out all the time. Then exercise just basically keeps them one step away from having a nervous breakdown. It burns off enough energy and anxiety and produces enough feel good hormone to get them through the day. But then it becomes like Sarah's describing, this sort of crutch where it has to happen because if it doesn't happen you can't cope without it and then what happens? You're just building the pressure back up and releasing the steam valve every day.

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And then your thoughts start again. And people do this with yoga and anything else. If that's the cycle you're in, we're not here saying that's bad or better or worse than eating, or drinking, or watching Netflix, or whatever people do to manage their emotions. But you're not actually solving your problem any more than if you were just watching Netflix. You're just releasing stress hormones and then feeling better and then doing it again the next day. And then what happens if you sprain an ankle? I just think about people like that and I'm like, "What is going to happen?"

What if you break your leg? What about when you're 80 and you can't really run 20 miles a day, what are we going to do?" You're not going to have any tools. What do you think about this Jill since you raised your hand as someone who?

Jill: Well, I do, I definitely do use exercise either walking, or running, or lifting as a short term mood management. If I'm having a day and I'm just feeling really pissed off. Sometimes I need to take the edge off of that before I can deal with it or dive in. But I also have a slightly different take I think on exercise and mind management because I think exercise and here I'm using the word that I hate, I'm just going to say running because that's what I teach.

Kara: Just plug in whatever you do.

Jill: Insert word here. But I think one of the things, one of the joys for me and a lot of the folks that I work with about running is that it actually creates a space where you can work on your mind and you can manage your thinking. And I think lifting is the same thing for me as well. So I'll actually spend time when I'm out running sort of diving in to what's going on in my brain. And I can either check out from my brain or I can actually go deeper

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into my brain and use it as, okay, I'm arguing with myself about whether I should go another mile or whether I should try a heavier lift.

And then I can ask, "Well, hey, why? What's going on? What are you afraid of?" So I do think it's a really powerful tool for the purposes of going deeper into your brain, all the while, yes, you can also use it to check out if you're thinking, this is something that I have to do to be productive today or whatever. There's just so much socialization that goes on around that. But I think it's an excellent tool.

And I think with running, pushing yourself, and I don't mean pushing yourself through pain or injuring yourself, but kind of challenging yourself to try something that is outside of your comfort zone is kind of a way to build evidence for the rest of your life that actually, maybe I can do things. My brain throws up roadblocks immediately. "No, because it's a terrible idea. You can't do this. It's going to be too hard." And then you do it and you're actually good at it. And then you can sort of translate that to other areas of your life. So yeah, I'm not sure if that answered your question or not.

Kara: No. That's a super important point which I think we're coming down on one side more because we're trying to combat the social conversation about this. But of course this goes back to the, it's the intention. Are you running just so you can say to yourself, "I did it, I'm allowed to eat today, or I'm a good person today, or this is the only way I know how to deal with that mood ever." Or are you doing it because you really just enjoy it, or it's an opportunity for you to engage with yourself in a different way?

I mean I certainly experience with lifting that my brain always wants to quit before my body does and that has been a useful lesson, that I'm physically stronger than my brain thinks I am. I mean we talk so much about the brain on this podcast, but we're never getting a verdict of it's always all the brain

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or it's always all the body. They're obviously connected and your brain is in your body. They're all the same. It's one big system. So I think, no, I think that's a very important point. And the ways in which you learn a lot about your capacity to whatever, do hard things.

Your capacity to, whatever your whole self-conception is. To me the reason that I can come up with if I were to set an impossible goal, I'm going to learn to love exercise or something. I think for me, and I would call it exercise. I would be like, "I'm going to learn to love exercising, some, whatever, an hour a day of very exercise." It would be because that would be a complete change in my self-conception and my idea of what my body could experience and enjoy or not enjoy and just feel neutral about and do, or whatever else.

Which is part of why I don't like this, you naturally want to move because I think people might decide, I think I should go for a walk because my muscles get tight when I don't, or I don't sleep as well or whatever else. And you actually don't have to love it. You don't have to force yourself and you also don't have to love it. And there's not something wrong with you if you do not naturally feel like you want to move your body all the time, which I think is also what we get taught. Yeah, Jill.

Jill: Yeah. Well and I'm a running coach. I do not naturally want to move my body. I am, if left to my own devices, I am completely sedentary. And so I think that there's this misconception. Yeah, this whole, your body naturally wants to move. Mine does not. It does not at all. But I also, I do move my body every day for the reasons of I actually do enjoy it once I get moving. But there's never any – if I really don't want to go for a run I just don't go and there's no beating myself up out of it. It's been many years of unraveling diet mentality to get to that point.

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Kara: Well, this is like anything else where people think the only two options are force yourself with mean words or do nothing. As opposed to there's this in between which is I can as with a child, mostly be like, yes, we're going to do this thing. There is this in between and most people think their options are like, if I don't naturally love it then I have to beat myself up and tell myself how terrible I am and those are my only two options. What did you want to say, Deb?

Deb: Yeah, I was going to jump in and say, also I think that it's a deep mythology that we have to love the things that we do as well. We can also just cultivate a quality of neutrality or friendship, or just curiosity of what is my relationship to my body and movement today? But I also just want to say, Jill, when you're like, "I'm just going to be completely sedentary." Unless you are physically unable to move and you are paralyzed and in bed, everybody moves. Everybody moves something. You get up and you go to the bathroom, you're moving.

And this is the problem with the language that we use. Sedentarism, which is now it's a whole concept and it's a disease and it's sitting is worse than smoking. We have now all of this fear around not moving. And we can become obsessive movers even if we don't even call it exercise and creating a stress cycle. Creating all of this fear and threat physiology that's happening inside of us. And so it's like we could just start by recognizing that humans are designed for movement. That's just a thing that most human beings move all the time.

And we're just not noticing how much movement is already baked into our day and into our life and we can just be like, "Yeah, that's a thing that I do. I am a mover." And I think just that mindset can be so helpful and so empowering for people when they keep thinking that, yeah, I'm so sedentary and I'm just sitting on the couch. Because we get then stories

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like there is this study about two to five minutes of walking after a meal 60 to 90 minutes after a meal has the greatest impact on your blood sugar and insulin levels. That's two to five minutes.

How much do we already think two minutes or five minutes of movement is not enough and so we choose to not do it because it's not meeting this kind of moral identity based concept of movement? And it's like, yeah, if we're telling ourselves we're sedentary we won't even think, I'm going to just get up and walk around for two minutes after I [crosstalk].

Kara: There is such an unrealistic idea, I love that study. There was a study a few years ago that was looked at, sort of people who live closer to a kind of traditional tribal society life. And it was like they actually sit around a lot. They're not necessarily sitting in desk chairs in this one posture hunched over a computer. It's good to open up your chest and move around. It's like our idea somehow that people were going on three hour hunting runs every single day. And therefore if we're not doing that we're not moving the way we were intended to or something.

When in fact most of society even before even modern technology was people like daily normal 'movement' which is running after your toddler to pick them up and standing around staring at the fire and making, whatever you're doing, going out to the garden. I mean I actually found that paradoxically you'd think I would hate any kind of tracking device but I tried one of those rings, it's a step tracker for a while. And I actually loved it because I didn't add anything. And it was like, I already, that's a significant amount of steps just from existing and living.

And that kind of self-conception of it's always in anything, it is so much harder to try to tell yourself, I am x and now I have to become y as opposed to I am already y. And maybe I want to dial it up a little bit or dial it down a

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little bit. If you are somebody who's on the other end and you are overexercising for kind of – we forgot to define the word 'buffering'. But you're doing it to deal with emotions, prove you're a good person, for moralizing reasons to understand that if you stop doing that, you're still someone who moves.

Either way that you're trying to adjust it, not having your identity be, it's black, white, it's on, off. I have to be doing this or I'm not doing anything at all I feel is a big takeaway. Yeah, Sarah.

Sarah: Yeah. So I was just reflecting back during the pandemic and being in a team environment for two years, being in a box and how that impacted me. And so just walking outside and being in nature, I accessed different thoughts whether I was moving or not. And so sometimes there's other factors, because for me running is meditation, running is all the things. And so through movement you can access different parts of your brain and you can problem solve, etc. And so different people use it for different things but I think environment is huge.

I don't like to work out inside. I don't like to go to gyms. I mean I went to one this last week and I was like, "I hate this. I like to be outside." And so it's just interesting to see what your preferences are. But when you're relying on something, because my two go to buffers are food and exercise and they seem to counter each other. But I want to eat whatever I want to eat. I also want to move a lot. And so it's just interesting to have the awareness that those are my buffers. And when I get stressed out I'm usually going to grab for one of those.

Kara: I think that point about the outside is so important also because obviously not everybody has access to the same amount of outdoors or enjoys the same amount. But there are also quite a lot of studies showing

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physiological benefits of exposure in nature. But I think that's such a good point. If you're somebody who goes for a 10 mile run every day and for you – not you Sarah, just the person listening that is overexercising, whatever, you're enjoying yourself, you're stressed out all the time, you don't feel okay if you don't.

How much of the benefits that you're getting are from the run? How much of it is from being outside? Would going for a walk in the woods give you some of the same benefits? We just assume that anything good that happens to us is from the exercise or it's from the intensity as opposed to no, just carry on moving your muscles around so the lymph flows around is good.

Or just seeing some birds is good for you or whatever kind of, you know, I always think about those studies about nutrition. And that your mood when you eat something and your expectation about it impacts what nutritional value you get from the food. So are you really better off if you go for a five mile run and every minute of the run you are telling yourself what a terrible person you are, and how fat, and ugly, and disgusting you are, and how you have to earn the right to eat a cookie later?

Is that super healthy for you compared to taking a walk and practicing nice thoughts to yourself? This one might be better. So I'd love to hear kind of closing thoughts from each of you. I think for me, I mean these conversations always are wide ranging and the way I love. But I'll pull them back for people listening to this, number one, just look at your intentions around, if you're somebody who does kind of 'exercise' and move a lot intentionally but you have drama or stress around that. Look at those thoughts, look at those intentions.

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Don't believe the lie then in order to benefit your health. It's that the most important thing is sort of the paces you put your body through regardless of how you're thinking about yourself, how you're talking to yourself. And even just like you said, we all buffer, like Sarah said, we all buffer. But just being aware, not shitting on yourself if you eat cake and praising yourself if you go for a run when you're doing those for the same fucking reason of managing your emotion. Just be aware of what you're doing and why. And practicing self-acceptance or compassion throughout that.

And then if you're somebody who does not move a lot and has a lot of drama around that as Deb and Jill and I are talking about, recognizing the ways you do move already. And thinking of yourself, you can think of yourself as a healthy strong person and you will get a result from that even if you are not really changing your behavior, at least at first. Although I think ultimately you end up, if you think you're healthy and strong, you end up wanting to do more. I think you get a kind of cycle going. Those are my takeaways, what about you guys?

Deb: I think the important thing is to re-center ourselves as the one deciding what it is that we need in our lives and that's hard to do without beginning to open up this internal conversation between our mind and our body. Notice how they're related. And just develop this deep curiosity and compassionate self-witnessing. So what are the thoughts in your head before you go for a walk or while you're taking a walk, when you feel some discomfort in your body? Bringing yourself along as your own ally will tell you so much more and be so much more healthful. I kind of hate that word.

Kara: I know, health promoting ish, whatever that means. Or have a better overall impact on your experience and body.

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Deb: Yeah. The idea that we always have to be pursuing health is a whole another thing.

Kara: Yeah, a whole other podcast. I think we're recording that at three with Michelle, so we're getting to that later today.

Deb: But becoming the one who decides which means uprooting the other people's voices in our heads and just being like, "What do I choose to do with this time and with my body?" Because as I coach on pain, I think what you just said was so right which is when we think of ourselves as strong and capable we actually, our perception of our body creates our body's experience. And so when we think of ourselves as movers moving is something that we just already assume we're doing. Rather than that there's this giant gap between me and the person I want to be.

And it's like, how are we already that person and then do we want to dial up the intensity or the frequency? What are the things that I actually want to be doing with my body? Do I want to play more? Do I want to be able to do these activities? Knowing our why and having that be personal can be really powerful.

Kara: Yeah. What about you, Sarah? And then we'll end with Jill.

Sarah: Yeah, so understanding, starting to unpack why we take the actions that we do. Unwinding some of the patriarchy, the internalized fat phobia and ableism, I mean so many messages that we pick up. Now for me even thin privilege and white privilege, but as I just started to unpack some of that and the nuances of why I do what I do. And being that compassionate witness and in this area specifically I don't think that there is a better approach to health than learning how to actually process your feelings. It's coaching 101.

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But I think in my personal experience, processing a feeling all the way through without resisting that. That is the best thing for your health. And just taking a look at those buffers, your actions and why. And just learning that process all the way through. And I mean that is the knowledge that you can have for the rest of your life. And so you can choose with intention and create the habits and the actions that you really want.

Kara: Yeah, love that, even if you do love to go on long runs, how nice would it be if those were just for fun because you didn't have to use them to manage your emotional state because you could do that separately anyway? Alright, Jill, what have you got?

Jill: Yeah, agree with everything Deb and Sarah have already said. And I guess I want to add too that if you do decide that you want to try something like running, or cycling, or swimming, or a more traditional sport, I'm using air quotes here. That just because there is this belief out there that you have to be fast to be a runner, you have to do sports a certain way. You actually do get to decide exactly how you want to participate because there's no definition of what it's like to be a cyclist, or a runner, or a triathlete, or any of that stuff.

And there's no body type in the dictionary that says this is what that type of person should look like. So you actually get to define all of it for yourself. And I think that that takes a lot of thought work because you have been told, "Okay, runners look a certain way. And they run a certain speed", and so forth. But you actually have the authority in your life to make those decisions for yourself and create the vision of what that looks like for you so that you can actually have fun with it and actually enjoy it and not use it as a punishment or a way to beat yourself up.

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Kara: Love it, yes. And if you are a fat person socialized as a woman who wants to learn to run, Jill Angie is your place to go. But we will put everybody's contact info in the show notes. Yeah, thank you guys for coming on and a deconstructing exercise. And I know that some people's brains hurt after this episode and that's a good thing. Alright my chickens, I'll talk to you next week.

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