

# MAKE DAILY MOVEMENT NON-NEGOTIABLE

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the more important your workout.

The worse your mood, the more important your workout is probably the Kathleenism that I personally find the most useful. I use it daily; I repeat it to myself like a mantra whenever I'm contemplating skipping my workout. My other mantra is "You are not the type of person who picks watching TV over exercising. If you want to watch a show, either watch it after your workout, or get on your bike and watch it as you cycle." The main take-away of both mantras is that movement is non-negotiable.

I define non-negotiables as life events that, for the most part, you just do. You

don't seriously contemplate if you should or shouldn't do them; they seem natural — a part of your everyday.

Everyone's non-negotiables differ slightly. Some people decide that saving a set amount of money each month is non-negotiable. Others decide that a daily family dinner is a must. Most people don't question if they should go to work or pick their children up from school. One is not born understanding these events as non-negotiable, but they become an unquestioned part of our identity and routine.

Moving and eating well are two of my personal non-negotiables, but they have

not always been. Even now, after years of learning to love exercise, I still don't always jump for joy before a workout. I do, however, know that I will ALWAYS feel better after working out — which is largely why I am no longer as tempted to skip as I once was. I used to do maybe 75 percent of my scheduled workouts. Now I do maybe 97 percent. I'm proud of that percentage, but it took work. My follow-through rate increased because I gradually changed the structure of my life and, possibly more important, I shifted my mindset so that daily movement became one of my non-negotiables. It became a non-negotiable partly because I can honestly tell myself that I will be a happier, peppier version of Kathleen when I move — and the more of a funk I am in, the more of a non-negotiable I know my workout is.

My body has a kinesthetic memory of how great I feel post-workout. Years of experience have taught me not only to push through the “will I or won't I” phase of my internal exercise question, but also to try not to even allow the question to enter my head. This relates to a point I have already made — that maintaining a healthier lifestyle takes perseverance, and that it is not simply enough to work through challenging times, you also have to learn from your mistakes. A Kathleenism you'll see me repeat many

times throughout this book is, when you fall off the fitness horse, don't give up. Use it as a learning experience and get back on a more informed rider. Setbacks are inevitable. You can either be discouraged by them and let them defeat you, or you can learn from them. The former is not helpful; the latter is. Learn from setbacks: use your experiences as building blocks in your quest to make healthy eating and movement non-negotiable.

To do this, we have to change the way you frame the exercise debate in your head. Notice that I said “we” — I'm invested in your fitness mission too. I want everyone to succeed and feel more energized and empowered. My ultimate goal is to minimize the times you have the internal “will I or won't I exercise today” debate. To do this, we have to reframe the “exercise question” in your head.



Stop saying, “Will I exercise today?” Instead say, “WHEN will I exercise today?”

Tell yourself, “I AM the type of person who makes working out a priority!”

Substituting when for if may seem like a silly semantic change, but it’s not! Asking yourself, “Will I exercise today?” gives you a loophole, an option to skip moving altogether. People who ask themselves, “Will I exercise?” give themselves the okay to decide that today is not the day to move. Let’s look at the following scenario: You sleep past your alarm and miss your workout, so you think, “Crap, too bad. I have plans after work, so I guess I can’t work out today.” That’s the thought process of someone who asks themselves, “Will I exercise?”

Now, imagine this scenario instead: You sleep past your alarm. You wake up and say to yourself, “That’s too bad, but since not moving is not an option, what is

my plan B? When will I exercise?” In the second scenario, the person fits in movement by going for a walk at lunch, taking the stairs throughout the day, and doing core work on the floor in the evening as their kids play. Sure, they didn’t get to do their full workout and, yes, a full workout may have been ideal, but aiming for perfection is not usually useful. The fact that a full workout would have been better is a moot point because it didn’t happen. In scenario two, at least the person didn’t give up. They formed a contingency plan and did something. Not moving was simply not an option. The next step in their fitness journey is to analyze if their original goal of training in the morning is realistic. If training in the morning is an unrealistic goal, they will continue to miss workouts, so they might need to rethink that goal. I discuss goal setting in detail in chapter 4. Get excited!

Challenge yourself to move every day for a month, even if you just walk home from work. After thirty days, moving will have become a habit, you will have found ways that exercise can easily fit into your life, and you will know how good it makes you feel.



Thinking, “When will I exercise today?” makes movement non-negotiable.

Now, I get it — if you’ve never worked out, the idea of daily non-negotiable movement is probably daunting. It can be hard to make yourself move when you’re not in the habit of exercising. I remember how hard it was at the beginning. My mom had to drag me to the gym. The good news is that it does become easier. Once you have established a habit, you’re less likely to ask yourself that “will I or won’t I” question. Plus, when you exercise regularly you develop a kinesthetic memory of how great you feel post-workout, which will help motivate you to exercise.

I’ve been able to make movement non-negotiable because for the past fifteen years or so I’ve learned from my health mistakes and gotten right back on the horse. Through some successes and many errors I’ve learned what works for me. I’ve consciously formed positive habits that create an environment where daily movement and healthy eating can both be non-negotiable. The three key words from the above sentence are learned, consciously, and habits. Apply the information I suggest in chapter 1 to learn how to consciously create healthy habits and how to set yourself up for success. Once you’re set up for success, understanding daily movement as non-negotiable will be that much easier.

Set yourself up for success. Take the time to establish an environment where movement and healthy eating become a “when,” not an “if.” For example, I make exercise dates with friends so that exercising is fun. I sign up for races so that I am both monetarily and emotionally invested in exercise. I always keep things like cut-up vegetables, fruit, cooked chicken, and beans in my kitchen so that I can easily whip up a healthy meal, and most important, I NEVER bring unhealthy food home. I know that if I am exhausted after a long run, I am more likely to mindlessly overindulge on whatever is in my fridge. So I don’t give myself that option. I simply don’t keep things like chocolate-peanut butter ice cream in the house.

## How Can You Make Movement and Healthier Eating Non-Negotiable?

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First, try to implement the concrete steps I outlined in chapter 1. To review:

1. Stop aiming for health and training perfection. Perfection is not possible.
2. Remember the two Cs. Make your workouts convenient so that you do them consistently.
3. Work toward finding your exercise bliss; find things that you LIKE to do so that training no longer feels like an obligation.
4. Find your health dream — the emotional reason WHY you want to move.
5. Flip your negative thoughts; turn “I don’t want to train” into “I am so lucky that I get to train.”
6. Find your inner athlete; learn to be proud of what your body can do, not just of how it looks.
7. Mindfulness + Preparation = Success. Become mindful of your particular health pitfalls so that you can prepare solutions in advance.

These steps are described in more detail in chapter 1. Following them will help you create healthier habits and thus an environment where daily movement can become one of your non-negotiables. Soon you will think of moving like brushing your teeth — something you don’t even contemplate not doing; you just do it!

Now, as I stated earlier, I have not always considered moving and eating well non-negotiables. I have spent fifteen years making them my non-negotiables. Even now it sometimes takes more than these seven tips to keep me on track. Whenever I feel like I am slipping backward in my health journey, or I am frustrated with my progress, I remember these next four tips. They help me continue to make movement and healthy eating non-negotiable, even when I just want to sit on the sofa and eat chocolate.

Never give up on making moving and eating well non-negotiable!

## Tips on How to Persevere

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1. Aim to trend positive. Instead of falling into the all-too-common trap of making unrealistic health goals, simply aim to trend positive. Aim to make more healthy choices this month than you did last month. If you miss a workout, don't worry. Instead of feeling frustrated, learn from your mistake. Don't let yourself get frustrated; perfection is not possible. Instead, decide not to miss two workouts. Get right back on the fitness horse and aim to miss fewer workouts this month than you did last month.
2. Stay in your own lane. Your health process is exactly that — YOUR health process. Don't get caught up in what trendy diets your friends are trying or not trying. When you go out to eat with friends or family, don't let their choices dictate your choices. Plan in advance what you will drink and eat, then don't give in to peer pressure. Don't be judgmental of your friends when they want to eat and drink, but don't eat cake in solidarity with them. Be your own health boss — stay in your own lane.
3. When you want to indulge, use my “love it” rule. Go ahead, treat yourself — life is worth living, and deprivation often leads to binge eating — but before you do, ask yourself two questions: “Do I love it?” and “Is this an appropriate portion?” Have an appropriate portion of something you love, not just of whatever is around. Don't gorge; you can always have another moderate portion tomorrow. Treat yourself to things you LOVE, and indulge in moderation. Don't feel guilty; enjoy your treat.
4. Prioritize getting enough sleep. The less you sleep, the more ghrelin hormone your body produces, which means that your appetite will increase. Plus, you will produce less leptin, which is the hormone that helps your body feel satiated. Getting adequate amounts of sleep can help control your weight and will make it easier for healthier eating to become a non-negotiable. Often, when I feel my health resolve slipping, it is because I am tired. If it is late at night and I want sugar, I try to instead just go to sleep. I always wake up the next day with a new resolve to make movement and healthy eating non-negotiable.

A few years ago I recorded my mood before and after workouts for two weeks. Each time, I recorded a higher number after my workout than before. Now, any time I don't want to exercise, I remind myself that my numbers were consistently higher after exercise. Since I know that I am almost guaranteed to feel better, I am less likely to skip my workout.

Now, you might be thinking, "Making exercise a habit and eating well is easier said than done. How do I actually do that? The tips are all great, but how do I initially motivate myself to train enough times that working out becomes a habit? How do I motivate myself to make enough healthy nutritional choices that eating well becomes a habit?"

I get it. Knowing and doing are two very different things. I've found the following five motivational exercises very useful. I think number two is my personal favourite, but they're all great. Experiment and pick what works best for you.

### ➔ Motivational trick 1

For the next two weeks, journal and rate your mood on a scale of one to ten before and after exercising. A rating of one means that you have intense negative feelings toward exercise and feel generally grumpy. A rating of ten means that you have intense positive feelings toward exercise and couldn't be happier. I've found that when people rate their mood between a one and

a five before exercise, it is normally six or above after exercise.

Another way of framing this same idea is the "law of initial value." That phrase has been etched into my brain ever since I took a psychology of exercise class during my undergrad studies. When applied to exercise, the law of initial value dictates that the worse you feel prior to exercise, the more opportunity there is for your mood to improve. Under this logic, the more unmotivated, cranky, or tired you feel before a workout, the more important the workout is.

Every time you want to skip your workout, remind yourself that your rating always improves after exercise.

### ➔ Motivational trick 2

Use the "ten-minute rule." I love this rule. Basically, the rule means that even if you really don't want to work out, you have to make yourself do something, even just for ten minutes. Tell yourself that you have to do a minimum of ten minutes, but that if

you still want to stop after ten minutes, you can. The rationale is this: Ten minutes of exercise is better than nothing, so if you do stop, that's okay. Usually, once you've done ten minutes, you'll continue and finish the workout. The next time you don't want to exercise, try it.

I credit this rule for getting me through ten marathons, over twenty half-marathons, seven half-Ironman triathlons (two-kilometre swim, ninety-kilometre bike ride, and a half-marathon), and one full Ironman (four-kilometre swim, 180-kilometre bike ride, and a full marathon). Endurance events are so long that they're daunting. I remember standing in the cold water in Lake Placid before my Ironman thinking, "How can I possibly do this? I should just quit and go back to bed." Instead, I

told myself, "Just start. Do ten minutes and if you still want to stop, you can." I didn't stop. Once I start a race, the crowds and the environment help to get me in the mood. At my half-marathon in Barbados I didn't want to start. I had myself convinced that the heat would make me have my worst race time ever. What happened? I got a personal best. I've come to learn that my pre-exercise mood is not a good indication of how well my race or training will pan out. I just never know how I will feel mid-workout. So it's always worth trying. If after ten minutes I want to stop, I can. I've only ever pulled out of one race. I used my ten-minute rule to make myself start — and I'm glad I started — but I was ill, and after ten minutes I knew it was not smart to continue. Starting was the right move because it allowed me



I even use this rule for writing. In fact, the ten-minute rule helped me write this book. Whenever I was unmotivated, I made myself write for a minimum of ten minutes. I told myself that after ten minutes I could stop if I wanted, but I never stopped. I usually ended up writing for at least two hours.



to make sure I was pulling out because of real illness, not just a bad mood. I have finished every other one of my races in large part because I used the ten-minute rule. It prevents me from feeling overwhelmed.

### ➔ **Motivational trick 3**

Make daily life your gym. This trick, like the ten-minute rule, is another way to make daily movement more palatable and less daunting. It concerns moving away from a conventional understanding of exercise. This is connected to my suggestion in chapter 1 of setting up a home gym and my suggestions in chapter 3 for how to weave movement into your daily life. Unless you are an athlete with very specific training goals, make your daily life your gym. When you frame your daily life as your gym, you will almost never have a legitimate excuse to skip a workout. Unless you have the flu, you literally can't escape the gym — it's all around you!

Gyms can be time-consuming to get to, and during the summer months it can be depressing to be indoors. Eliminating the act of having to get to a gym can make it much easier to make movement a non-negotiable.

Incorporate activity into your daily life: go for a walk with your partner at night instead of watching TV, use the stairs instead of the escalator, purposely take the long way to the bathroom, practise a sport with your kids, or even do some squats as the kettle boils or as you wait for the bus. Just move for thirty minutes a day. Don't feel like you have to go to the gym to get exercise. This way of thinking can be extremely useful on vacation. When you are away from home it is SO easy to simply say "Screw exercise; I am going to relax." Don't let yourself off the hook. Try a new sport like surfing, go sightseeing on a bike, or take a walking tour of the city.

### ➔ **Motivational trick 4**

Walk yourself through how you will feel depending on the choice you make.

When you want to skip your workout, first have a conversation with yourself. Talk yourself through how you will feel depending on the choice you make, and what type of person you want your future self to be. I love this. Other than the ten-minute rule, this is the motivational trick I use the most.

For example, let's say I want to watch TV instead of running. I first imagine how I will feel if I

When you have an urge to make a snap decision regarding your health, imagine how that decision will impact the rest of your day and your overall goal. Walk yourself through how you will feel three hours from now, and try to remind yourself of why you formed the goal in the first place.

accomplish my workout. I will feel great! My day will be better. The relaxation or social time I get to have after my workout (although possibly shorter) will be higher quality. I will be the version of Kathleen that I want to be.

I then imagine how I will feel if I skip the workout. I know I will feel crappy! I might get more time to relax, but the quality of the relaxation time will not be great. I will just sit there, metaphorically kicking myself, wishing I hadn't let myself off the hook. I will be annoyed at myself, because I will not be the version of Kathleen that I can be proud of.

On the flip side, if I am active, even if I just go for a twenty-minute walk, I will get less relaxation time, but I will enjoy that time more, and I will feel pride in my decision.

I am not arguing that you should never relax! Part of adopting a healthier lifestyle is building in time for yourself that includes adequate time to relax and sleep. I am not suggesting eliminating downtime. Instead,

schedule adequate sleep and relaxation time so that you can actually enjoy your downtime. Then move when you plan on moving. Get the best of both worlds — quality activity and quality downtime.

### ➡ Motivational trick 5

Last but not least, when all else fails, negotiate with yourself. Tell yourself you can have an extra-long bath if you lift weights or that you can listen to your favourite podcast only if you run. Or make a date with a friend and tell yourself that you can have coffee and a chat only if you have an exercise date first. When I am feeling unmotivated, I allow myself to buy a few passes for group-exercise classes at the new “It” studio. They are an added expense, but trying something new motivates me to train. Plus, I usually make a date with a friend to try the class since combining exercise and social time can be a great motivator. (I discuss the benefits of establishing what I call a health entourage in chapter 7.)



I am absolutely not above negotiating with myself. For example, I find bike intervals extremely difficult. (I do my intervals by placing my bike on a CompuTrainer — a stationary machine that measures watts, speed, and elevation). The intervals are hard. Sometimes when I don't want to do them, I make a deal with myself. I put my laptop on a bench beside my bike and watch TV during the recovery breaks between intervals.

# CHAPTER TAKE-AWAY

The next time you don't want to exercise, remember that everyone has moments of low motivation. Don't allow yourself to fall down the rabbit hole — the one where you convince yourself that you are the only person who struggles to exercise. That is not a helpful train of thought. We all have moments of low motivation; I know that I absolutely do. Remind yourself that you will feel better after the workout and that once you start exercising, it is easier to continue.

Get back on your fitness horse a more informed rider. Learn from your “down” moments. Maybe you don't want to exercise because your goals are unrealistic (see chapter 4), or maybe you are feeling discouraged because you are focusing only on the aesthetic benefits of exercise (see chapter 8). Whatever the reason, analyze the problem and persevere. Yes, the health journey is frustrating at times, but the struggle is worth it. The payoff is huge — it's your health!

Find activities that you enjoy or that inspire you. Sign up for a race. Train with a friend. Catch up on your guilty TV pleasures while on the treadmill. Or make your workout an adventure. Try a new running route or type of exercise class, or download new music. Reward yourself post-workout with a pedicure or a hot bath. Use whatever means necessary to make your workouts more fun, or at least more palatable. Tell yourself (sternly), “I am NOT the type of person who skips a workout.” Working through these steps to set yourself up for success will mean that when you ask yourself, “When will I exercise?” the answer will be obvious.