

Movement, Exercise & Respecting the Body

A gentle reading and reflection guide for eating disorder recovery



You do not need to earn food, rest or care. This guide can be read at your own pace, alongside the interactive chapters, journal and support plan.

This resource does not prescribe exercise. Some people need to avoid activity entirely during recovery. Follow individual medical advice, especially if you have dizziness, fainting, chest pain, a racing or irregular heartbeat, or significant weakness.

Space to Breathe Therapy

How to use this companion

Read a section, then use the matching chapter in the interactive resource to save your reflections. You can also write on these pages, discuss them with someone you trust or leave any question unanswered.

You are allowed to stop reading when you need to. The aim is understanding and choice, not completing every page.

A note about safety

If you are medically unstable, recovering from severe restriction, or have been advised to stop exercising, do not use these pages to plan a return to movement. Ask your eating disorder team or GP about your individual circumstances.

The twelve themes

- 01 Welcome — A kinder relationship with movement
- 02 Understanding exercise — When movement becomes complicated
- 03 Pressure and rules — Recognising the pressure
- 04 Body signals — Listening without judgement
- 05 Rest and recovery — Rest is an active part of care
- 06 Exercise guilt — Responding to the urge
- 07 Nourishment — Fuel is not a reward
- 08 Comparison — Stepping away from comparison
- 09 Joy and choice — Making room for a different future
- 10 Support from others — You do not have to manage this alone
- 11 Difficult days — A plan for the moments that feel hardest
- 12 Next steps — Recovery is not measured in steps

A kinder relationship with movement

Movement does not have to be earned, and rest does not have to be justified.

Eating disorder recovery can change how exercise feels. Something that once brought pleasure may become tangled with rules, guilt, fear or pressure. This guide offers room to understand those experiences without judgement.

Pause and reflect

What would you like your relationship with movement to feel like, beyond appearance or performance?

CHAPTER 02 | UNDERSTANDING EXERCISE

When movement becomes complicated

An activity can look ordinary from the outside while feeling compulsory on the inside.

Exercise can become a way of managing anxiety, compensating for food, seeking reassurance or feeling in control. The important question is not simply what someone does, but what happens emotionally when they cannot do it. Medical risk can exist even when the activity seems moderate.

Pause and reflect

When you think about movement, which feelings are strongest?

Recognising the pressure

A rule may sound like motivation while quietly removing choice.

Notice thoughts such as “I must”, “I have to make up for eating” or “I cannot rest today”. Rules can become stricter during stress. Recognising a rule is not a failure; it gives you a chance to discuss it with your treatment team and respond differently.

Pause and reflect

What is one movement-related rule you would like help loosening?

CHAPTER 04 | BODY SIGNALS

Listening without judgement

Your body communicates needs, even when it is difficult to interpret them.

Fatigue, pain, dizziness, feeling cold, poor concentration and changes in sleep can all be important signals. Eating disorders can make hunger, fullness and energy cues harder to recognise. Do not rely on feeling “fine” as proof exercise is medically safe.

Pause and reflect

What signs might tell you that your body needs additional care or professional advice?

Rest is an active part of care

Recovery does not require you to prove productivity every day.

Rest allows your body to repair and conserve energy. For some people in eating disorder recovery, stopping exercise entirely is medically necessary. If resting brings anxiety or guilt, the feeling can be acknowledged without treating it as an instruction to move.

Pause and reflect

What would make a period of rest feel more supported?

CHAPTER 06 | EXERCISE GUILT

Responding to the urge

An urge can be powerful without being a command.

When you feel compelled to exercise, consider what happened immediately beforehand. Was there a meal, a comparison, a difficult emotion or an unexpected change? Try naming the urge, moving away from tracking apps and contacting someone in your support network. If you have an exercise restriction, follow it.

Pause and reflect

What could you say to yourself when guilt arrives?

Fuel is not a reward

Food is a basic need, not something to be earned through movement.

Your body needs energy for thinking, breathing, warmth, healing and daily life, whether you exercise or rest. Restricting food around activity can increase medical risk. Work with your eating disorder clinician or dietitian on appropriate nourishment; avoid using activity to decide whether you deserve to eat.

Pause and reflect

Which compassionate reminder about nourishment would help you?

Stepping away from comparison

Another person's routine is not a prescription for your body.

Fitness posts, wearable devices, challenges and social comparisons can reinforce eating disorder thoughts. Curating your feeds, muting triggering accounts and setting boundaries around step counts or exercise conversations may protect recovery.

Pause and reflect

What is one comparison trigger you could reduce?

Making room for a different future

Enjoyment cannot be forced, and movement is not required to prove recovery.

If your clinical team says activity is safe, a healthier relationship may eventually include flexibility, pleasure, connection or simply choosing not to participate. The ability to rest without compensating matters as much as any activity. There is no deadline for returning to exercise.

Pause and reflect

What would freedom of choice look like for you?

CHAPTER 10 | SUPPORT FROM OTHERS

You do not have to manage this alone

Support can be practical as well as emotional.

Loved ones can avoid comments about calories, weight, fitness or “discipline”. They can offer company during rest, help reduce exposure to triggering content and listen without trying to fix everything. A clinician can assess medical safety and tailor recovery goals.

Pause and reflect

What could someone do that would genuinely support you?

A plan for the moments that feel hardest

Small supportive actions can interrupt a familiar cycle.

On a difficult day, prioritise safety, nourishment and connection. Pause fitness tracking, notice the urge without negotiating with it, choose a grounding activity and reach out to a trusted person or your treatment team. If you feel faint, have chest pain or are medically unwell, seek urgent medical help.

Pause and reflect

What three things could help you through a difficult day?

CHAPTER 12 | NEXT STEPS

Recovery is not measured in steps

Progress may look like resting, asking for help or allowing uncertainty.

You are allowed to have setbacks and mixed feelings. A recovery plan is not a test of willpower. Keep returning to the choices that support health and connection, with guidance from professionals who understand eating disorders.

Pause and reflect

What is one kind, realistic next step you can take?

My reflection page

Use this page alongside the private journal in the interactive resource. There is no right way to answer.

What am I noticing about movement, rest or pressure today?

What would feel supportive rather than demanding?

My support plan

The interactive version lets you save and download your personal plan. This paper version gives you space to discuss it with someone you trust.

When exercise guilt or pressure shows up, I might notice...

People and services I can contact

Restful or grounding options that do not involve exercise

My medical or treatment guidance about activity

For family, friends and supporters

Support often means helping someone feel safe enough to rest, eat and ask for help. Avoid praising weight loss, fitness discipline or “earning” food.

What helps

Offer companionship during difficult rest periods. Listen without debating the feeling. Respect the person's treatment plan. Help reduce comparisons, step-count conversations and fitness-related pressure.

Words that can help

“You do not have to prove anything today.” “Rest is allowed.” “Would you like me to sit with you?” “Shall we talk to your treatment team together?”

When to seek medical help

Contact the person's GP or eating disorder team for concerns about medical stability or compulsive exercise. Seek urgent medical assessment for fainting, chest pain, severe weakness or an irregular heartbeat; in an emergency in the UK, call 999.

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A companion to the interactive Movement, Exercise & Respecting the Body resource. This educational guide is not a substitute for medical or psychological care.