

JUNE 1, 2022

BY LUCIE FROST · FITNESS

# I've Burned Out on Exercise and You Know What? That's OK

She used to run triathalons, but today Lucie Frost has found peace with moving a muscle only when she absolutely must.

I used to know how to exercise. If I were to run over a sharp rock and get a flat on my road bike, I could change the tube in less than three minutes. I knew how to angle my right hand when I swam, so no matter how much I stroked, my shoulder wouldn't get wonky. I

could perfectly calibrate between running and rest cycles to avoid shin splits.

Apart from the mere logistics, from knowing *how* to exercise, I knew how to get myself to actually *go* exercise. I knew if I signed up for an event that required a strict training plan, like a half or full *Ironman*, I was likely to follow through. I knew if I found myself slacking, I could join Team

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in Training or some other group of athletes (I even thought of myself as an athlete once), who would hold me accountable. I knew buying a bike jersey in a funky pattern inspired me to want to use it.

I say all of this in the past tense, because exercise is no longer something I know. Oh, I know I *should* exercise. Over a decade ago, I lost a whole bunch of weight (so much weight that folks would see me and say, “Oh my God, you’ve lost a *ton* of weight!” and I’d say “Thank you,” but think, “Well, it was a bit less than a *ton*.”) My being fanatical about exercise is what helped me get the weight off, keep the weight off. I had weight loss surgery, so that helped too of course, but the dedication to staying fit was a huge part of it. But then, I burned out. I was so driven about exercise for so long, that I just plumb wore myself out.

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## Burning Out

Why don't I just join another exercise group, you ask? Sure, I could huddle with friends over coffee and get giddy about how we should all do a marathon this year and how fun it would be to train together. But then it will be early on a Saturday, the first Saturday of training, and I'll have stayed up so late the night before, and boy, has it been a long week, and didn't it rain last week, making the roads unsafe, and I should really focus on self-care, don't you think? I'll just go next week.

But then next Saturday will come, and since I missed the first one, I'll probably hold people back making them re-explain everything, I'll be behind and never quite able to catch up, and it's just not fair to make people lag behind with me. I'd be better off joining the next training group, with a fresh start, when I have more time to focus on it. Oh wow, I don't know anyone doing the next training group. I guess I'll just train on my own. And guess what? I won't.

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What about the cute clothes? Couldn't you buy yourself a new pair of Hoka running shoes or a nice floral Speedo, you wonder? Sure, I could. And then they could sit in the closet right next to all of the other Hokas and suits I bought, in the hopes that they would inspire me. Guess what? They didn't.

Could I just sign up for another Ironman, you wonder? ha! Ha! HA!

Instead, I sit in front of my computer, writing about how I should be exercising. And I never, never, ever use a muscle, unless all three of these criteria are met:

(1) My husband invites me for a walk.

(2) It's not raining. Nor is it too, too hot. Not too dark either. Nor too cold. And absolutely no wind.

(3) I have nothing I can say I am busy with.

Under those three circumstances, and only those three circumstances, will I move my body in any way that would help it survive.

## Can You Trick Yourself Into Exercise?

A while back, I decided I should get an at-home clothing rack...I mean a *treadmill*. I used it maybe twice. Why? Because treadmills are instruments of torture. No really, they are. In the 1800s, difficult prisoners were made to climb the Tread-Wheel, a spoked paddle wheel. As the wheel turned, the spokes would pump water or crush grain. A *MentalFloss* article quotes a former prison guard as saying it was the treadmill's "monotonous steadiness, and not its severity, which constitutes its terror." That summed up my feelings just about perfectly. Terror wasn't my kink, so I gave it up.

Then I decided I should trick myself into exercising. I Googled it and found the best suggestion: Only wash your hair on days you work

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So now, I wake up to my early alarm and sit around in

qu. Your hair will get nasty, you will start to feel like bugs are climbing on your scalp, and eventually you'll go for a run just to make the itching stop. Here's the thing: that may work on a 20-year-old, but telling me, a middle-aged woman, that I don't have to wash my hair? That's a prize, not a punishment.

Lycra and a sports bra all day, looking the part of a fitness chick.

After that, I read a suggestion by Brené Brown (or some other such inspirer) that you should chop the task up into small pieces. The first component: set out your clothes. Do only that for the day. And I did it! The next day, set your alarm as if you're going to go exercise, but don't! I did that too. The next, put on the activewear, but don't actually go exercise! And I did that too. But fearing that the next step would actually be for me to go out and sweat some, I quit reading the suggestions. Now, I wake up to my early alarm and sit around in Lycra and a sports bra all day, looking the part of a fitness chick.

"Why this exercise block, do you think?" my husband Richard asked me.

"Maybe because it feels like Work, and now that I'm retired, I refuse the W word?"

"But you write and do other things that take effort."

"Hmmm, maybe I'm just so out of shape now that fitness is a mountain too high to climb," I said.

"It's just a walk, Lucie, not Everest."

“Didn’t they ever teach you that an object at rest stays at rest? It’s science, Richard, basic science.”

## The Health Issue

What if I were to approach exercise from a more positive frame of reference, looking at my overall health?

Let me go back a bit. I

mentioned that I had weight

loss surgery. That was back

in 2009. The night before the

surgery, I made a list of what

I hoped the surgery would

help me achieve. The list

was long and made sense,

including things: from the parental (keeping healthy so I could be

around to raise my children) to the practical (being able to fit in

chairs and booths), the physical (living without foot pain) to the

emotional (not feeling apologetic/embarrassed about having to sit

next to someone whom I knew I would bother). None were vain, “I

want to look hot” goals, but instead “I want to be able to live,

breathe, walk, climb, ride, sit, dress, eat, fly, run, swim” sorts of

goals.

Looking back, I’ve met every one of the goals I made for myself.

No, I’m not skinny, but that was never on the list.

So when I’m feeling unhappy with my body or angry at myself for

not treating it perfectly, what if I remember my main objective: to

make sure my weight doesn’t prevent me from living a full life?

That is all.

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I’m not skinny,  
but that was never  
one of my goals.

So should I go exercise? Sure, but apparently, that's not happening today. Am I going to fall off the weight cliff if I don't? No, I am not. I am keeping my weight in check and my body healthy, so I can allow myself a moment to get movement-inspired and to think about how I can go from exercising fanatically and obsessively to moderately and sustainably. So where does that leave me? Living my full life, confident that my body will move when it's ready. That is all, and for today, that is plenty.

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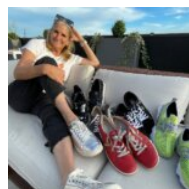
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