

# The Compassionate Way to Health & Fitness

Lots of us would like a better body, an amazing workout habit, and a diet that celebrities would die for.

OK, maybe that's an exaggeration, but most of us definitely have an ideal when it comes to fitness. We want to be super healthy, and we strive for it. Maybe we strive and then fail and feel bad about it, but we strive.

What would it be like to not strive for these fitness goals?

What would it be like if we removed the striving, and found compassion instead?

## The Problem with Striving

When we strive for a fitness ideal (which is usually what we do), there are a few fundamental problems to be aware of:

1. The ideal is one we will never meet. Even if we do great at our goal, it won't be what we pictured. For example, I ran several marathons and an ultramarathon because of ideals I had in my head, and completed them ... and they weren't at all what I pictured. They were still worthwhile, but not at all what my fantasy was.
2. You have a good likelihood of failing at some point, not meeting your ideal, and then feeling bad about yourself for failing.
3. You don't hit the ideal right away — most ideals are several months, if not years, in the future. So for the first few days, first few weeks ... you will just do the activity but not hit any ideal. This is likely not fun. You might set ideals for each day ("go for a run today!") but even then, you'll go for the run and it won't be what you fantasized it would be.
4. Once you reach the goal you're striving for, you're not content. You just find another goal to strive for. And another. Until you're dead, having never been satisfied.

What we don't realize is that there's nothing to strive for. We're already in the perfect place: a moment that is filled with beauty and wonder, a life that is filled with untapped love and compassion, a goodness in ourselves underlying everything we do. We're already in the ideal moment, but we take it for granted and fantasize about something else instead.

We can just stop striving. Just find joy in this present moment, without needing the crutch of our fantasies.

## The Compassionate Way

So if we stop striving for health and fitness ideals, does that mean we just lie on the couch, stuffing our faces with potato chips and slurping soda all day? Umm, yuck. And no.

What we can do is 1) realize joy in who we are, where we are, and our intricate connection to the wonderful people all around us, and find contentment right now; and 2) in that moment of joy and contentment, we can act out of love.

What are some acts of love that we can do, in this moment of joy and appreciation for what is right here in front of us?

1. **Appreciating the gift of our bodies, we take care of them.** The bodies we have are incredible, wonders of nature, and we take them for granted. We abuse them by being sedentary, taking drugs, eating junk food, not taking care of them. Instead, an act of appreciation for our bodies is to care for them. Exercise, walk, eat well, floss, meditate.
2. **Appreciating the gift of life, we explore the outdoors.** There is so much to notice and explore, to behold with absolute wonder, that it's a waste to be online or on our phones all day. Instead, it's an act of love to get outside and move our beautiful bodies.
3. **Appreciating the gift of food, we nourish our bodies.** Instead of abusing ourselves by putting junk in our bodies (just to satisfy cravings of comfort), we can find joy in the nourishment of our bodies with gorgeous, healthy, delicious food. And appreciate that the fresh food we're feeding ourselves with is a gift, grown from the earth by people we don't know who support our lives, a miracle not to be taken for granted.
4. **Appreciating this moment, we meditate.** This moment is filled with brilliance, and yet we often ignore it. Instead, we can sit and meditate, to practice paying full and loving attention. We can do yoga, moving while we meditate. We can meditate as we go for a run, lift a barbell, ride a bike, swim in the ocean, walk in a sunny park.

There is no need for striving for fitness and health ideals. Instead, we can let go of those ideals and appreciate what's right in front of us. And in gratitude, act with love and compassion to take care of ourselves and pay attention to the moment we're in.