

# Approaching Movement In Recovery



Project EDSA  
Resource Library  
*for individuals in  
recovery*

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Moving your body is an incredible way to de-stress, release endorphins, and elevate your mood — but only when it's done for the right reasons.

Movement should feel grounding and joyful, not like a chore or a punishment. During recovery, deciding whether or not to move your body can feel confusing, especially when it's hard to tell if your motivations are truly rooted in care or still tangled with old patterns.

In this guide, we'll walk you through **how to approach movement in a way that's honest, supportive, and aligned with your recovery.** You'll find gentle guidance to help you figure out whether movement is the right step for you right now, or if resting may be the kinder choice.

## Step 1: Figure out your WHY?

Before even thinking about how you might want to move your body, pause and ask yourself: **Why do I want to move right now?**

It's easy to fall into the mindset that movement is something we have to do; however, oftentimes that mindset is rooted in diet culture, not self-care. And believe it or not, most of the time, what your body needs most might not be more movement but instead proper rest and recovery.

Try to take a step back and answer these questions as honestly as you can:

- **Am I truly craving movement, or do I feel like I should be moving?**
- **Will I feel guilty if I don't move today?**
- **Am I using movement to make up for what I ate or how I feel about my body?**
- **Am I choosing a type of movement I genuinely enjoy, or am I hoping it will change how I look?**



If any of your answers to the question above were for reasons other than the genuine desire to move, then movement may not be the best choice for you right now.

While this may sound scary, **this is not permanent**. While moving your body isn't the best step to take right now, I promise you that once you are in a better headspace, movement will be even more fun and rewarding for you and your mind.

## Step 2: Take the time to truly assess what your body needs

Once you've taken time to reflect on why you want to move, the next step is to tune into what your body is actually asking for.

Sometimes, we confuse mental restlessness or anxiety with physical energy. But needing to "do something" doesn't always mean your body needs a workout. In fact, there are many ways you can produce the same feeling if endorphins are released outside of exercise as well!

I encourage you to take the time to differentiate between what your body is asking versus what your eating disorder or inner critic is trying to impose. There is no shame in choosing rest. Rest is often the bravest and most healing choice you can make to support your long-term goals of mental and physical wellness.

Ways to relax other than exercise:

- Make yourself a cozy drink (tea, hot cocoa, flavored water)
- Light a candle and journal your thoughts
- Do a 5-senses grounding exercise
- Cuddle with a pet or stuffed animal
- Take a warm shower or bath
- Sit outside and feel the sun or breeze on your skin





## Step 3: Redefining what movement means

Before you begin to move your body again, it's important to start off your relationship with movement on a positive note so you don't fall back into unhealthy habits.

For many of us, movement once served as a form of punishment, control, or a way to manage our bodies— a mindset that can be difficult to change at first. However, movement doesn't have to be — and is not — about doing the most. At its core, the purpose of movement is to feel connected with your body, whether that's through a run or some light stretching.

Ask yourself this:

- What kind of movement do I genuinely get excited to do?
- Would I still choose this movement if there weren't any attachments or expectations tied to it?
- Is the type of movement actually making me happy?

## Step 4: Start small, then build your way up

If you've taken the time to reflect and truly feel ready to reintroduce movement, start small—smaller than you think you need to.

In recovery, even gentle movement can bring up unexpected feelings like guilt, fear, or the urge to fall back into old patterns. That's why easing in with care and intention is so important. It's always better to build gradually than to push too hard too soon and risk setting yourself back.



Here are some low-pressure ways you can begin to reintroduce movement. Remember, you don't have to stick to these forever — they're just gentle starting points. The goal is to rebuild trust with your body and your intentions, and to make sure movement is truly serving you, not hurting you.

- Stretch in bed for a few minutes when you wake up
- Take a short walk outside
- Put on a song you like and dance
- Do gentle yoga focused on breathing
- Follow a calming movement or body scan video



Project EDSA (Eating Disorder Support & Awareness) is a youth-led initiative dedicated to uplifting lived experiences, sharing honest recovery stories, and making support more accessible.

Through our Voices of Recovery project and student-written resource guides, we aim to amplify youth voices and offer the kind of supportive community we wish we had during our own recovery.

**This resource is a part of Project EDSA's Resource Library.**

This is a growing collection of research-backed, student-created guides, tools, and support links designed to support mental health and eating disorder recovery. If there's a topic you'd like us to cover or if you're interested in creating a resource yourself, please feel free to let us know!

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