



Exercise became the sole purpose for my day

Blog

Content warning – the following resource covers elements of when physical activity can become unhealthy. We will be touching on topics including eating problems and over-exercise/exercise addiction. If you find any of the content triggering, we encourage you to reach out to Mind's Infoline on 0300 123 3393 or Samaritans on 116 123 for immediate support if you need it or see [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk) for further information.

How 21-year-old Catherine broke the cycle of over-exercise during lockdown.

Like many people, I was put on furlough during lockdown. My days lacked structure and routine so I started exercising more as a means to fill some time.

This was helpful at first. After all, we were being advised by the government to spend 30 minutes outdoors doing exercise, however I started becoming intensely focused on my workouts – and started to feel ‘I was never doing enough’. Sometimes, I exercised in secret. Before I knew it, exercise became the sole purpose for my day.

We live in a society where any exercise is seen as beneficial for both our mental and physical health; however I was never told how to take breaks and rest. I didn’t realise the effects it was having on my wellbeing until it was too late. My thoughts revolved around when and how I would exercise – the minimum I told myself I ‘needed’ to exercise just kept growing. It felt like I couldn’t escape my own mind

I had little physical interaction with people because of lockdown. And I didn’t feel comfortable telling them how much I was working out. I was scared about telling those close to me out of fear they’d stop me exercising. Looking back, I realise I needed to stop entirely to break the cycle – but that was my greatest fear.

“I felt like I couldn’t escape my own mind”

Breaking the cycle

Inevitably, I burnt out. It all became too much and I confided in my mum. To recover I had to force myself to reduce my exercise, even if I didn't want to. I knew in the long-term it was necessary to get my life back. So I monitored how much I was doing and reframed my 'minimum amounts' into 'maximum amounts'.

It was extremely difficult to break the cycle and it felt excruciatingly uncomfortable at the beginning – challenging the thoughts that made me feel safe. Instead, I found other ways to manage my emotions outside of exercising. I also tried new activities like baking, journaling and starting calligraphy. After a while, it almost became a relief I wasn't forcing myself to exercise. I was finally allowing myself to rest.

I'm still on a journey of figuring out my relationship with exercise. I believe I'll always have to monitor how much I do so that it doesn't spiral out of control again. If you think you have an unhealthy relationship with exercise, my advice would be to start being kinder to yourself by taking your first active rest or rest day.

“What’s the worst that could happen?”

