

## **Mind Your Movement: A Q&A About The Book's Best Advice**

*On the eve of publishing her book, *Mind Your Movement*, Laura Dow sat for an interview that covered some of the book's main points, including get started moving now/doing something you can do right away, and then tailor your activity to include a bit more as you progress.*

*The transcript below was lightly edited for space and clarity.*

### **With all the exercise books, video and social media advice available about exercise, why did you decide to write a book?**

This book, *Mind Your Movement*, is a compilation of my 20 years' experience working with older women. And typically, my experience has been that older women have been left out of the general fitness equation.

That means instead of adapting exercise and workouts to an older woman's body – whether that's somebody who is stiffer, or has medical conditions, perhaps post-knee replacement or post-hip replacement – the philosophy of many fitness places is just to fit those women into a box with the generally healthy population of 30- and 40-year-olds.

The other part of the equation is that women, particularly, don't tend to want to work with younger trainers who don't understand an older woman's aging body. And being 64 myself, that is something I understand. I've seen the changes in my body and I've been injured.

You asked why a book now? Well, I finally got around, post-pandemic, to sitting my butt in the chair and writing articles on the fitness topics that I'm most interested in. And after a period of about a year and a half doing this, I suddenly realized that I had a book, and that I could put this together with a lot of hard work. And so here we are.

### **There are, as we said, a lot of books out there. And there's a ton of social media advice for people who want to stay in shape and get back into shape. What is your book giving readers that perhaps isn't out there?**

Yes, you're absolutely right. The field is just inundated with information. And one of the charms, if I may say it like that, of this book is that it's very common sense. Again, it's based on 20 years of working primarily with women over the age of 50, all the way up to 103. And a 50-year-old is not going to exercise the way a 103-year-old exercises and vice versa.

So, any movement routine must be very adaptable, which means that you start with basics. When I work with a woman in that any age category, I ask what she is able to do now? What does she have trouble with? I always try to start from success rather than starting with something that maybe a 30-year-old woman could do, like a burpee, that a 65-year-old woman doesn't want any part of.

### **What's a burpee?**

A burpee is a squat; go down to a push-up position, do a push-up; jump up to standing and give a little hop. That's one definition of a burpee

**And what if people who are reading this site say, 'I can't do a burpee, I'm 65 years old.' What's your response?**

Let's figure out what you *can* do. Let's get you moving. And again, start with basics and common sense

**OK. Talk to me about that. I know there are a lot of things keeping us on the couch or in our favorite chair. We have a lot of great television, social media, books. But, on the other hand, technology and digital technology can help us move. Right?**

Yes, that's absolutely correct. So, let's just go back to the first part of your statement about sitting on the couch. One of the things that I hope readers get from this book is that many elements of your life already involve moving and movement. For example, your breathing, your digestion, your brainwaves your heart, those are some obvious things. And so, movement is part of the human experience.

Sitting on the couch is actually working *against* how the body was designed to operate. The body is designed to move. Now, you don't have to go climb Mount Kilimanjaro or go to Everest or run a marathon.

**Thank goodness. What can somebody do instead?**

Movement can be as simple as walking a bit each day; maybe taking a yoga class, or doing some at-home strength training.

You mentioned digital opportunities. Absolutely. The pandemic really changed the world in a lot of ways. But in the fitness industry, it changed it to the extent that you could now exercise in your home with apps with either live classes online or streaming classes online. You can pay a subscription and have classes delivered to your inbox.

So, in many respects, fitness has come into your home and you no longer need a gym to stay healthy. What you need to stay healthy is to move.

**Great. So, let's say we have 50-year-old who hasn't been moving on a regular basis for years. She doesn't belong to a gym. She has a desk job and when she's not working, she's a lot like me. She's watching television and is addicted to her phone. But she *knows* she must move. What do you recommend in the book that she should do to get started?**

If possible, I'd start walking. The human body, again, is designed for movement and walking is step one.

**No pun intended.**

Right, no pun intended.

If it's safe for her, because you have to consider your environment, she could walk around your house. She can walk up and down stairs. I have clients who have used the hallways of their apartment complexes and the mall to walk.

You have other choices if you don't feel like you can go outside for safety reasons or for weather reasons. If you live in an area that's excessively hot or excessively cold, or there's snow, or there's ice, you can walk around your house. So, walking would be number one.

The next thing is I would look at what activities of daily living she does. What part of her daily routine gives her trouble? And for a lot of people who haven't moved in a while it's getting up and down from a couch or getting up and down from a chair or going upstairs. They huff and puff as they go upstairs.

So, if I were her trainer, I would start with an assessment. "Tell me about your life and how you use your body. And if you're not using your body at all, and your knees creak and you feel stiff, then maybe we start with walking and a bit of stretching."

So, it's very individualized, which is a point I make in the book: you want to make sure that whatever you do is individualized for *your* life and *your* body where *you* are right now. In other words, we don't take the generally healthy population's level of fitness and apply that model to everyone.

Many older folks have a lot of things going on in their lives and in their bodies. You don't take a generic, normal human being's exercise routine and try to fit yourself into that box if you have medical, physical or other health limitations. You individualize it and customize the exercise for you, so that you're starting from a good place where you're not going to hurt yourself.

**I think our 50-year-old can motivate herself to walk a few minutes a day or climb stairs instead of taking the elevator. What's next after that?**

Well, she can move forward and start layering in other exercises as she gets more accustomed to movement.

**Does our 50-year need to join a gym?**

No. And this is from somebody who's worked in commercial big box gyms for well over 15 years.

**OK. Should our 50-year-old join a community center with a fitness facility? What do you recommend?**

I recommend she *start moving*. What does that mean? If she has someplace that's convenient, because convenience matters, someplace that's affordable for her, because it has to fit in her financial budget. She also must think about the time that she has because it takes time to drive

over, it takes time to get changed, it takes time to work out and then reverse that all you know backward.

Perhaps she'd be better off exercising at home. Maybe she has a very stressful lifestyle a demanding job, or maybe she's caring for her parents or whatever the scenario is. So, it's more important to do the movement than it is to find the perfect situation.

**Let's change the scenario. Say I'm moving every day. I don't watch much television. I walk to the grocery store each week and walk to my car. I park far away in parking lots so I must walk longer to get places. Is that enough?**

Yes and no. So yes, that's fantastic. And I would definitely acknowledge and applaud the person who is doing that kind of movement. But I'd also ask, are you doing any weight training? You might tell me, 'Yeah, I'm carrying my groceries.' And I'd be, 'OK, yes, that is weight training.'

But do you go grocery shopping every day? To a certain extent, we want to have some kind of weight training three to four times a week, alternating days, if possible.

Now I'm getting technical. We don't need to get technical at the beginning. But you want weight training and you definitely want to do some stretching. If you're moving your body a lot, then there needs to be either recovery, which could be foam rolling, yoga, pilates and then some stretching.

**Do I need to keep records? Do I need to keep a count of how many steps I'm taking every day?**

If you're looking for progress, yes, you probably want to manage your data. You definitely want to keep track of what's happening. However, if keeping track of what you're doing is going to preclude you from doing that then no, we want you to move first, track second.

Now, some people will get excited about tracking because they want to see progress. They want that sort of little reward. 'Oh, I did four more steps than I walked yesterday.' And I'm not being sarcastic. If you do more today than you did yesterday you are making progress.

So, if you're the type of person who gets excited about progress and you want to see it on a piece of paper, please track it. But, if you're somebody who's going to let the tracking get in the way and you say, 'Oh, I forgot to track. Oh, now I'm just gonna give up,' then don't worry about it.

**But it's easy to track today, right?**

Yes, if you have an iPhone or another kind of smart phone if you have a smart watch or a smart ring. There are trackers already in those devices.

**Great. Talk a little bit about the mind and body collaborating on movement. Tell us what that is and why that's important.**

I think this is one of the things that sets the book apart from many other fitness pieces of information that you can get either online or in a book or reading a magazine article. And this is something that I've used for years with my personal training clients.

What I mean by the mind-body collaboration is that your mind tends to be sort of the parent in all of this directing the body to do XYZ. And the body is seen as sort of a secondary process. And if you don't get your mind on board, if you don't know how to work with yourself in your most efficient and effective way, you're actually going to get in the way of being successful and making progress in your movement.

### **For example?**

Let's go back to the person who, if she tracks her movement, will feel discouraged or feel encouraged. That's a really good example of how your brain, if you don't know yourself, you might choose the wrong strategy. And then you've shot yourself in the foot because it's not working for you.

If you don't know that you're the kind of person who really loves data or really hates data, then you may choose that wrong strategy. And you may decide that there's something wrong with you rather than that the strategy is not working.

The real issue isn't you; you're not wrong and you're not bad. It's the strategy that doesn't work. So, I work with clients to evaluate whether the tools and strategies work for them, instead of having to fit into a pre-conceived strategy or a model that isn't right for them.

### **A few last questions. I belong to a gym; I'm exercising and I may even have a trainer. Do I still need to read your book?**

Well, do you have people in your life that are not moving? Do you have anybody in your life that wants to start an exercise routine or a movement routine and doesn't know where to start? I think it's fantastic if you're the person that is in the gym multiple times a week working with a trainer, I think that's all fantastic.

So, you may not need the book necessarily for you. But you may have loved ones, extended family, friends that would benefit from reading the book.

### **In the book, you mentioned a statistic from a 2020 CDC study, released in 2022, that seems sobering. It said something like 90% of women 65 and older are not exercising regularly.**

So, there's a few components here. There is cardio and weight training. And what this study found was that a little fewer than 90% of all women, 65 and older, did not meet the CDC guidelines for cardio and weight training. As I note in the book, some of these women have health issues preventing them from moving and weight training. Most do not, though.

We're linking to [the study here](#). In addition to the finding about women 65 and older, the report contains information about women and men and their levels of exercising as they

**age. In short, CDC found women and men move and weight train less as we get older. Have you noticed differences between women and men in their view of exercise and movement?**

What I found in my career anecdotally is that women tend to be really good with the cardio. It is relatively simple for them to hop on a treadmill, to walk outside with friends, or to take that yoga class, which is not really cardio.

But they were a lot more intimidated by weight training. And one of the aspects of this book is, with basic common-sense information, to try to demystify movement. That movement is something natural for your body, it is something that is intrinsic body, your body knows how to move, your brain doesn't have to teach the body how to move. Maybe the brain needs to help the body stay safe, that's a different scenario.

Or maybe you have specific conditions that you need to modify movement, but the body already knows how to do this. So, what I found with these women generally is that the strength training was scarier and intimidating. They were confused by the machines in the gym, just learning how to change the settings on the machines, for example, so they didn't want to look stupid, they didn't want to get injured.

And so, I hope that the book helps demystify the idea of working out and also encourages women that you *can* do this. It's really good to be strong, especially as we age, it helps so many different elements of the aging process: balance, bone health, being able to live on your own and being able to lift things, do things in the activities of daily living that we mentioned earlier.

**Let's get back to basics. You said we must move. Fine, after this I'm going to take a walk around the block. Can I walk in my work shoes?**

You can, in theory. I don't know if that's what's best for your feet. I'm not a podiatrist or a foot specialist. However, I recommend regular walkers invest in a pair of walking shoes. Maybe to get started if you don't care to invest the money then your work shoes may be okay for a very short period. I don't recommend that as a regular thing.

But if that's what's going to get you started. Certainly.

Please don't walk in heels. Don't walk in high-heeled boots or high-heeled shoes. That's an unwise idea as it throws off the alignment of the body.

**Last question. We've been talking about women older than 50. How about men older than 50 reading this book? Will they get something from it?**

Yes, I hope that they'll understand that the mind-body connection is really important because for my male clients what I've seen is they just rush right over any kind of feedback that the body is giving them about slowing down or about something hurting.

It's been my experience that most of my male clients were not taught to pay attention to how and when their body is speaking to them. Therefore, they ignore signals to stop and pay attention so they're a lot more prone to injury.