

Ep #41: Use Exercise to Build Your Confidence



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Carrie Holland, MD, CPT

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You are listening to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast, Episode #41. If you want to have more confidence, start by moving your body. Let me explain how this works.

Welcome to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. If you're balancing career, family, wellness, and some days sanity, you are in the right place. This is where high-achieving, busy, working moms get the tools they need to eat, move, and think. I'm your host, physician, personal trainer, and Certified Life Coach, Carrie Holland. Let's do this.

Hey, how are you? What's new, what's good? So, what's good here, we are going to zone in and talk about exercise today, but with a twist. I know I've already told you about the many physical benefits of exercise, right? You know that it is good for pretty much every single body system you've got. It's good for your brain, your heart, your muscles, your bones, your endocrine system.

So, most of us know that to be true, right? And beyond that, we also know that exercise is really great for your mood and wellbeing. Specifically, it reduces feelings of depression and anxiety. And this is true after a single bout of exercise, by the way. It increases your overall well being. And this is true even for strength training, on its own, in addition to other forms of cardiovascular activity. It increases your energy, and it helps you sleep better. And really, that's the tip of the iceberg.

And all of this is to say, the time to start exercising is now. So yes, of course exercise because it is good for your body. But really, I'm encouraging you to exercise because it is just so awesome for your mood. But even beyond that, what else does exercise give you?

Okay, so here's a secret that may not be so much of a secret, but I want to let you in on it. In case you're not aware already, exercise will increase your confidence. It really will. It will give you confidence. In fact, I know this may sound hokey, but if I could bottle up the awesomeness that I feel after a workout and sell that, I would. It is just that powerful.

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There is no medication, no food, no vitamin, and certainly no supplement that I have encountered that gives me the same feeling that exercise does. With that said, what I really want to zone in on today, is the connection between confidence and exercise and how you can translate that to the rest of your life.

I have said this before, and I will repeat it here because I think it is so true, exercise is like a dry run for the rest of your life. The lessons you learn from exercise and the strength you gain from taking care of your physical body, most definitely can be applied to other areas of your life. The confidence that you build from exercise, it is real. And if you know, you know.

For any of you who exercise regularly, you know this already. There is a level of confidence you gain when you exercise and take care of your body. I have seen it; I have felt it myself. And I have seen it in some of you; the change in how you view yourself when you take care of your physical body through regular exercise. It is real. And I want that for all of you.

So, whether you are still contemplating exercise, if you're brand new to exercise, if you're inconsistent with your exercise, that's okay. The fact that you are here listening to this tells me that you probably want more and are considering how exercise fits into your life. You want to feel good in your body. You want to feel confident in yourself. At least, I know that's what I want for myself. And I would hope you would want that for yourself, too.

And my message is this, exercise will do it for you. Exercise will give you confidence in a very pure, very real form. Here's why the confidence that you get from exercise is unlike anything else I know: You are the only one who can do the work. No one can walk the miles for you. No one can curl the dumbbells for you. No one can swim the laps for you. It's your work, your results, you get out of exercise, whatever you put into it.

And the best thing about this is that exercise is something over which you have complete control. When you finish your run, that's all you. When you towel off after your swim, that's all you. That new PR on the bench press,

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again, all you. And that is one of the most empowering things I have ever known.

Because I didn't always have that feeling, but now I do, and now I can understand it and make that connection between exercise and confidence. I want to shout it from the rooftops, and I want you to have it too, because I think everyone should feel this good, seriously.

So, if it is not apparent yet, I'm going to make it crystal clear here. I would not be the person I am today without exercise. I would not have had the confidence to quit my doctor job, start a business, start this podcast, sever some toxic family relationships, or manage some of the most difficult phases of my life if it wasn't for fitness. Exercise gave me a foundation of confidence.

You can think of it this way, I'm taking this amazing idea from the book, *Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?* by Julie Smith. Please, read it. She explained that confidence is like a home. You build it, and then when you move, you have to rebuild it, but you're not starting from scratch. You've done it before, so you have a foundation of skills and attributes, and you know how to build. You're just building a different house this time around.

Apply this concept in relation to exercise. Once you build confidence in yourself through exercise, you take those skills with you, and apply them in a new setting, like your career or starting a passion project, or starting a business or taking that dance or art class that you always wanted to take.

For me, exercise helped me to see that I was capable of a lot more than I thought. It helped me transform from an uncertain, scared, and frankly, weak girl into a confident, strong woman. Exercise allowed me to test my limits in a safe way and see that I could accomplish what I set out to do. It gave me self-efficacy, that belief in my ability to achieve my goals. And you know how I feel about self-efficacy.

And once I saw that, once I saw that I could trust myself, put in the work, and feel awesome by taking care of my body and brain through exercise.

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And once I saw how exercising positively impacted all the other areas of my life, something shifted. Then, I realized that everyone needs to know about this. Everyone needs to know what exercise can do for your confidence.

We spend so much time touting the health benefits of exercise. That's pretty widely known, and I don't think anyone's going to dispute that. Even now, too, we know pretty well that exercise is good for your brain and for your mood. But I want you to understand this on a deeper level. I want you to be able to use the confidence that you gained from taking care of your body and brain through exercise, and then go apply that to other areas of your life.

And that's what we're going to talk about. So, let's talk about how you can exercise to build confidence, and then transfer it to other parts of your life. I want you to walk away understanding that exercise is so much more than movement. Okay?

The first step to creating confidence through exercise, is to find a form of movement that you love. If you want to feel better, and you want to feel strong in your body, I would argue that you've got to move it. I may get some flak for this, but I really don't think you can be physically strong without moving your body.

With that in mind, what is it for you? What movement do you enjoy doing? So, let me be very clear here, I love to lift weights. I've said it before, I'll say it again, of all the different forms of exercise strength training is my favorite. Give me a barbell, give me some plates, I am happy.

However, I recognize that not everyone feels this way about strength training, so fine. Instead, find the type of movement that you enjoy and make a commitment to do it.

I had a call with a new client recently, and we were talking about her exercise regimen. She used to do half-Ironman triathlons. Then work and life and kids happened, and things got super busy. And she largely stopped

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exercising altogether. However, she's found some time to do some walking. She'd really like to get back to that on a more regular basis. She said that strength training just didn't appeal to her. And that's totally fine.

Hear me now, you don't have to do anything you don't want to. For this client, it was walking. You could see it in her eyes and in her expression as she was talking about it, her entire energy shifted. You could see it. She said that she liked to walk because not only did it clear her mind, but she said, "It's good for my soul." And there it is. That's what I'm talking about.

I don't care what you do. The key is to find something that you love, and that you will keep coming back to. To make it clear, every client I'm working with has a different fitness plan. Some walk, some ride their Peloton, some have a strength training app on their phone, some do the workouts I post on YouTube, some do CrossFit.

There is no one saying what you have to do, you just have to do one thing, right? Pick something and find something that brings you joy, something that calms your soul. Find something that makes you feel good. That's it. Don't make it any more complicated than that. Your days are busy and crazy enough, the exercise you choose to do should not be seen as a chore.

And here's why. If you see it as a chore that defeats the entire purpose. Do not feel that in order to exercise you have to step on a treadmill if you hate running, or that you have to lift weights, or that you have to do a couch-to-5k. No, choose what you like. Is it Zumba? Is it a barre class? Or how about walking, just straight-up walking? How about that?

I cannot state how important it is to find a mode of physical activity that you enjoy. This is essential. This is especially true if you're not currently doing any exercise. Find something that you like and that you actually want to do, not something you have to convince yourself to do. We're not talking about inducing torture on yourself here, it's exercise. Let's not make it that deep.

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So, if you are someone who absolutely hates exercise, or you have had a previous negative reaction or resistance toward exercise, I think it is that much more important for you to find something you love. Remember, exercise is not punishment, not at all. It is the exact opposite. It's one of the kindest things you can do for yourself. And it only happens when you love yourself and you love the movement that you're doing.

Most commonly, when I see significant resistance or negativity towards exercise, it's often for one of a few reasons. Maybe you used to exercise in the past as a means to an end for weight loss. Or you thought you had to exercise in order to look a certain way. Or maybe you use exercise as a way to punish yourself, instead of using exercise as a way to be nice to yourself. Or you over-exercised as a way to compensate for your food choices.

If any of these apply to you, it makes total sense. When you view exercise as a means to an end, a requirement, or a punishment or as a way to cancel your food, of course you're not going to love it. But it is possible to change that. It does not have to be that way.

But it requires that you get really honest with yourself. And that right there, that is huge. I spend a lot of time working through this with clients. If you've had a previous negative relationship with exercise, do a deep dive and ask yourself why.

Ask yourself why you were choosing to exercise in the first place? Did you think that you had to run 30 minutes, five days a week, in order to consider yourself fit? Did you convince yourself that the only way to lose weight was if you amped up your minutes on the Stairmaster and blew past 150 minutes a week?

Did you spend loads of time comparing yourself to your super fit friend or sibling and decide that you had to take on a similar exercise regimen, too? Or did you think that the only way to justify your food was by trying to exercise it off? What was it for you?

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I know this is a hard question to consider, and I'm asking this very important question because so many of you have a negative relationship with exercise. Because you were previously, or maybe you still are, using exercise for the wrong reasons.

This is why I say over and over and over again, don't use exercise to lose weight. First, the evidence does not support this as an effective means of weight loss. Exercise will help you maintain weight loss; we have data to support that. But as far as the process of losing weight, exercise is not where you should be focusing your efforts.

But many of you are still stuck in this thinking that if you add another day of exercise, or if you can run six miles instead of five, then the weight will melt off. No, that is not the point. And that is just setting you up to resent exercise when it doesn't meet your unrealistic expectations.

And please don't use exercise to cancel out your food; this is not a math equation here, really. I know there are posts that tell you if you eat one Reese's Peanut Butter Cup that equals this many minutes on the treadmill. I would love to personally remove each and every one of those types of posts from social media, because that is feeding the association between exercise and food and weight loss. And that is not what this is about.

Instead, here's what I want to offer you, find something you love to do, for no other reason than you love to do it. Find a way to move your body that feels good and that you'd like to do. Whatever it is, strength training, walking, swimming, dance, running, Taekwondo. I don't care what it is. Find the type of exercise you love to do, because it will feel so much better to move your body. Because you've chosen it and you love it, rather than if you feel obligated and are using it as a means to an end. Okay?

To keep it very simple: Find a way of moving your body that makes you feel awesome, and then do it. Okay?

Once you've found the type of exercise that you enjoy and makes you feel good, the next piece to this is showing up consistently. You know I love

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consistency. And consistency is essential if you want to make something a habit. Consistency matters more than anything else, I would argue. This applies to any success you're looking for, and fitness is no different.

Here's why consistency matters if you want to build confidence through exercise. When you show up regularly for your workout, you are upholding a commitment you make to yourself. So, think about it. Unless you announce it or unless you're meeting someone, no one knows. And no one will be hurt or bothered if you don't show up for your workout.

But when you know this, and you show up and exercise anyway, that's something. That means something. You're proving yourself to yourself. When you show up consistently to exercise, you're telling yourself a few important messages. You're telling yourself that you matter. You are telling yourself that you are worth the investment of your time and energy to take care of your body and your mind.

That taking time to do something good for your body is absolutely worth it. You're also building trust in yourself. You are proving to yourself that when you make a decision and you make a commitment to do something, it is as good as done. The more you show up for yourself and follow through on your commitments, the more you can expect of yourself in the future, and that benefit is enormous.

Remember, consistency and following through on your commitment to yourself is what creates discipline. I love to talk about discipline, because I honestly feel that creating discipline in your life is the key to freedom. If you have brain drama around food, or if you have drama about wanting to exercise, but you're not following through, we work on creating discipline.

When you make your habits automatic and put them on autopilot, when you make a no-brainer decision that you're going to exercise and then you follow through and do it repeatedly, that's building discipline. That's putting your habits on autopilot, and it's reinforcing that you follow through.

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Then you can take that discipline and apply it to other parts of your life. And because you've proven to yourself that you show up for your walk, or you show up for your run, or your swim, or your weight training session, even if the day wasn't perfect and you really didn't want to, you are reinforcing that discipline for yourself. And then, you can apply that discipline to other areas of your life.

That is priceless. When you can trust yourself and know that you will deliver by showing up, you can take that and apply that self-trust to other parts of your life. And you know you've got your own back, that is key.

All right, so you found the thing you enjoy doing. And then you do it consistently and have created discipline for yourself. Once you've done both of those things, then you can start to amp up the intensity. Meaning, you can start asking more of yourself.

As an example, imagine you finally got out of your own way and started running regularly. Maybe you started out by running around your neighborhood and realized that you really enjoy it. That running is your happy place. And then, because you've built trust in yourself, and you know that you're capable of more, you stretch yourself and sign up for a 5k. And in that process of training for that race, you see that you are capable of a whole lot more than you thought you were.

Or maybe you really love strength training, and because you've learned through practice that you can put up some weight, maybe you decide to sign up for a CrossFit class. And while it may be new and different, and a little out of your comfort zone, you show up.

And you show up because you know what it feels like to be a newbie and know that you will do just fine. You show up because you know that you can handle something new, different, and uncomfortable. Because after a while, it's not going to be. And what was at first uncomfortable is now the new normal.

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Then you go and prove yourself, right? Meaning you run the 5k, you do the marathon, you step on a bodybuilding stage, you get in the lake for your open water swim. I'm just speaking from my own personal experiences, I know you have your own.

So, let me be clear, when you bump up your intensity, it does not have to take the form of a race or a competition. Okay? That is certainly one way of doing it, but if that's not for you, fine. But in whatever setting it is, when you choose to take on a physical challenge, and you realize that you are capable of more, and then you go and prove yourself right, you walk away a stronger person.

And when I say that, I mean physically strong, for sure. Of course, when you amp up the intensity, you are going to walk away stronger physically. But I would argue that the mental strength that comes from challenging yourself physically is even greater. And that's just it. That is the whole point here.

When you learn to challenge yourself physically, in whatever way that is, at whatever level of intensity you choose, when you challenge yourself in that way, the mental strength comes with it. And that strength is unlike any other type of strength I know. When you prove your outer strength to yourself, you are, by nature, growing your inner strength.

I have tried for years to find a better way to describe it. And to be perfectly honest, it is a challenge to describe this. But if you have been there and done it, you know exactly what I'm talking about. And here's the kicker, this is key. When you do this, you are taking care of your physical body from a place of kindness and love towards yourself.

And yes, I know that sounds silly when I'm talking about loving yourself while grunting it out under a squat bar or running your tail off in a race or amping up whatever exercise you're doing. But it's exactly that. When you push yourself physically, from a place of being kind to yourself and not from a place of punishing yourself, then you're onto it.

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I say it all the time and it bears repeating, you cannot beat yourself up and do better. It just does not work that way. So, when you choose to take on a physical challenge for yourself, and you do it from a place of kindness, that is very different from taking on a race or a program or a challenge from a place of wanting to punish yourself.

You will see results in the form of inner and outer strength. It's showing yourself that fine balance of toughness and kindness. When you choose to go all-in on yourself and push yourself physically, you're choosing to make yourself uncomfortable.

You probably know this already, but when you go hard at the gym, it burns. When you do sprints and preparation for a race, your lungs and your legs feel like they're on fire. When you swim hard in the pool, it takes a lot of gas from you. But think of what it feels like for you when you push yourself physically. In the moment, it doesn't really feel great. In fact, it often straight-up burns.

But remember, you are choosing to take on that burn. You kind of know what you're signing up for. But until you start doing those 400-meter sprint repeats or until you start to do Fast 50s in the pool, you don't know exactly what it's going to be like; but you do it.

And then you realize it wasn't as bad as you thought. Even if it was a really tough workout afterward, you can look back and high-five yourself and say, "Hey, I did that. And that is awesome." In that process, you got stronger, and you feel better. In fact, I would take it so far as to say you feel amazing.

Then what do you do with it? You transfer it. So, if you are anything like me, or if you are anything like the many women I have coached through exactly this, you take that strength and you apply it to other parts of your life. I've seen it before; I've experienced it myself. And maybe this has been true for you.

When you take care of yourself and you push yourself physically, and as a result, build up your self-trust and confidence, you take that confidence,

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and use it elsewhere. I've mentioned it before, but I've noticed a pattern of my own, and maybe you can relate. I noticed that I used big physical challenges as test cases for other big challenges in my life. And it's only now, in hindsight, that I can see it all makes sense.

I'll use bodybuilding as an example. I was training for my first bodybuilding show as I was making my first big career transition away from clinical medicine. As you can imagine, there was a lot of fear, self-doubt, and uncertainty in that career transition. I was making a big leap into something new and different, and I was not sure how it was all going to pan out.

I knew that I was not meant to practice clinical medicine for the rest of my career. And I had an inkling that maybe I could help women in a different capacity, by becoming a coach. But there was still a load of doubt. And at the same time, I was showing up to the gym every day, and pushing myself in ways that I did not think were possible.

While that physical challenge was hard, I did it. I kept showing up. I felt the burn and I kept going. And as I got stronger physically, in a way, it provided reassurance that I could get through this big career transition. I had parallel hard things going on. I was training for something and asking a lot for myself physically. While I was asking a lot for myself in relation to my career. I was putting all of the wheels in motion to start my business and pivot entirely from practicing medicine to becoming a life coach.

And all of these changes I was choosing, no one told me I had to train for a bodybuilding show. No one told me I had to shake up my career; I told myself. While there was a load of doubt along the way, I am so glad that I trusted myself and kept going. Because it has led me to be sitting here talking with you today.

I'm grateful that fitness was my test run and showed me that I was capable of way more than I thought I was, both in and outside the gym. I've seen this in my clients too. I had one client, who, when she finally started taking better care of herself and started exercising regularly, her life shifted. She

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got stronger, exercise became a non-negotiable, and she felt better. And as she got stronger physically, she got stronger mentally.

We used that strength to address some major issues in her marriage. She cited physical strength as the foundation that allowed her to take big, adult, grown-up steps to make her marriage better.

I share all of this because this is what I want for you. I am grateful to have exercise in my life, for so many reasons. I love to feel strong physically. I am who I am today because of fitness. But beyond that, the strength and confidence that exercise has given me in other areas of my life is beyond measure.

Alright, so to review, this is how you use exercise as your foundation to build confidence. You find something you love. Anything, I don't care what it is, strength training, running, pickleball, walking. Whatever it is, find the movement that makes you feel amazing. And then do it repeatedly.

I know I harp on consistency, but the only way you are going to build strength and build trust and confidence in yourself is by showing up consistently. You are proving to yourself that when you make a commitment, it is as good as done. And it feels really awesome to keep your word to yourself.

Next, you amp up the intensity, you challenge yourself. It does not have to be extreme, okay? It does not have to be a big race, or even any competition at all. All I'm asking is that you find a way to ask for just a little bit more of yourself, so you can see what you are made of. And then you see how strong you come out in the process. This is the best and most fun part.

Remember, your work, your results. No one is running the miles for you. And the strength you take away from that is priceless, and it is all yours. It's teaching you that you can depend on yourself, that you can ask for more of yourself, and you will deliver. And once you've done that, you go and apply that strength and confidence to other areas of your life.

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Even if you're doing something new and different, that feels hard, you're okay because you've done it before. You're taking that same skill set and applying it to a different place in your life. Confidence is a transferable skill. And once you've got it, you've got it, and you are unstoppable.

I want to leave you with this. If I haven't made it abundantly clear yet, I want to shout it from the rooftops: Exercise is more than movement. It is medicine. It is a form of therapy for some of you. It is peace. It is your happy place. Do not underestimate what movement can do for you, both physically and mentally.

Most importantly, movement is a way to showcase the strength you've got on the inside that has always been there. And that is the purest form of confidence, I can imagine.

If you want help pulling out that inner strength, let's talk. If any of this speaks to you... If you were formerly active but have lost touch with exercise because of work, life, kids, etc. If you remember what it was like to feel strong, and you want it back... If you are curious about how to incorporate movement into your life and see how it benefits you in every way, let's talk. This is what I help people do.

We work together, through coaching, to make your exercise and your nutrition, automatic, easy, and non-negotiable. And then we take the strength that results, and we go and blow your mind with what you can do next.

Check out my website, go to www.CarrieHollandMD.com/contact. Send me a message and let's meet, so we can talk about how to get you strong, inside and out.

All right, thank you again for hanging out with me and I will catch you again next week.

If you like what you've been hearing, please review the show. I would love to get your feedback and ideas. Your suggestions have inspired episodes

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and will help me make the show better for you. And share this podcast with a friend, text a show link, share a screenshot, or post a link to the show on your social media. Be sure to tag me @CarrieHollandMD on either Instagram or Facebook, so I can follow along and engage with you.

This is how we get the word out to other working moms who want to feel strong, inside and out. If you know someone who wants to feel better or eat and move differently but she is too tired or too busy, it is time to change things up. And you know, making that change starts with how you think. And that is what we do here on the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. I'll see you next week.

Thanks for listening to *Strong as a Working Mom*. If you want more information on how to eat, move, and think, so you can live in the body you want, with the mind to match, visit me at CarrieHollandMD.com.