

# Ep #299: Healing Disordered Eating and Exercising with Christine Chessman



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Jill: Hey there, Jill here, and real quick before we start this episode I want to let you know that there is discussion of disordered eating and exercise behaviors throughout. It's done in a very compassionate way, but it's there. So if that's something you prefer not to hear about, now is your chance to move to a different episode.

Hey, runners. So as I promised, I am bringing back the amazing Christine Chessman for part two of our conversation from a few weeks ago. Now, Christine is an online strength and movement coach who helps women over 40 move more freely, feel strong and take up some fucking space. Love this.

She's also the host of the *Find Your Strong* podcast, which I highly recommend. And we're going to drop links to all of this later, but also her Instagram is fire, so you've got to check that out as well. So, Christine, welcome back to the show. Or welcome to show, last time I was on yours.

Christine: Yeah, I'm so excited. I'm so excited and was a little bit nervous as well, just because I'm so excited I got nervous.

Jill: I know, I kind of was too. I was like, "I really like talking to Christine." And I'm just like, "I want us to have a really good conversation." Not that I was worried, but I don't know. You know, human brains.

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Christine: Yeah.

Jill: So I'm going to stop talking and I would love for everybody to know more about who you are and how you came to become a strength and movement coach.

Christine: All right, I'll try and keep it short. I'll keep it brief.

Jill: Oh, no, ramble as much as you want, I'm all in.

Christine: Weirdly, I used to be in IT. I used to work as an IT manager, so in software. And anybody who knows me goes, they have no idea why I was in that. That was not me, that is not my personality, I should never have done that. I was not good at it. But I think I had my kids and when they were little I just thought, "I'm going to change careers." And I thought, "I'll be an aerobics instructor. I'll teach some sort of dance fitness."

And if I'm absolutely honest, I did start it because I thought wouldn't it be great if I could exercise all the time as my job. So we'll get into that. We'll get into obsessive exercising. And so I started off pushing the calorie burn and doing all the things I thought I was supposed to do and saying all the things, you know, fit into this dress, Christmas is coming up. This was many years ago.

I was never comfortable doing that so I just slowly over the years started – Instagram has been fantastic because I've connected with some amazing women. But as soon as I kind of started exploring more intuitive eating and just understanding my own issues around body image, as I saw my girls because I've got two girls that have grown up, I was like, "I've got to start dealing with my shit because they're just going to take it on for themselves."

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So I think that was a massive wake-up call. And I've always felt so strongly that women, yeah we talked about this, deprioritize strength training in favor of cardio because they want to maintain their weight or they want to lose weight or they want to look a certain way. And that just takes the power away. And I just want women to feel good in their bodies and try and take the emphasis off how we look to how we feel. And that's a massive, that's basically why I do what I do. That's all it's about for me.

Jill: Oh my gosh. And it's so true, we are all socialized to put, and men are socialized this way too, to put the emphasis on how a woman looks and not her value as a human being, how she feels, all of that.

Christine: Yeah.

Jill: It's so appearance oriented. You say on your website, on your Instagram and everything that one of the things that you help women do is to take up space. And what does that mean to you?

Christine: Yeah, I mean this is obviously coming from me, I hold thin privilege, I've never been in a larger body and I can't speak to that. But for myself it sort of came as a relative to me, I sort of struggled with anorexia for many, many years. Which morphed into different types of eating disorders like clean eating, the orthorexia, compulsive exercising, all of that good stuff.

And I realized and there was a light bulb moment, I was trying to shrink. I was trying to make myself smaller so I could kind of just fade into the background. I wasn't letting myself actually take up the space that my body wanted to. So I was trying to make it smaller than it wanted to be. And it wasn't ever supposed to be like that. So it was when I realized, actually, I deserve to be here, I deserve to let my body exist as it is happy to exist.

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That, for me, is taking up space. Just exercising or moving in a way that serves your body, not to make it look a certain way, or to beat it into shape or to punish it. But that actually makes you feel good. So that was a massive shift for me.

Jill: Yeah, I love that.

Christine: Yeah, so I think, does that answer it?

Jill: Yeah, it does. And I think, because a lot of the folks that listen to this podcast would self-identify as fat women or larger bodied women. And so when you think, if you're in a fat body taking up space often means, like to me it means giving myself permission to just be the size that I am.

And I have always thought of that as like, oh, that's just for fat people. And it's fascinating to me to hear that you, somebody who is in a more traditionally thin sized body is like, oh, no, no, no, I have the same issues with feeling like I can't take up the amount of space that my body wants to occupy.

Christine: Yeah, and I never want to say it in a way that – So it's a very different issue for me. And this is something that I've kind of worked through over the years. But because I can go into any shop on the high street and I can wear the clothes, I'm not going to struggle with people trolling me because I'm a certain size. I don't have any of those, I'm not marginalized in that way.

And so it's very different when I say take up space. But that's not about me personally anymore. It's about the women that I serve. I do have, most of my clients, about half, yeah, about half of my clients might identify as being fat women. And I want them to take up space and build strength and feel

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good. And I don't want them to start shrinking themselves and feeling not enough for this culture that we live in, this toxic fitness culture.

But it's an interesting conversation because we all have body image issues, but I'm not saying that my issues are the same as somebody in a larger body. And I think that's the –

Jill: Well yeah, but I kind of think at the root they are.

Christine: Yes, yes, yes.

Jill: Because we are all taught, regardless of body size, that you need to be smaller. And it doesn't matter what size body you have, your primary thought is, "I need to be getting smaller. I need to be thinner. I need to be thinner." It doesn't really matter what size you are, it's always going to drive this kind of behavior that is really self-destructive.

Christine: 100%. And I think, sort of from my lens, I was always wanting to make myself smaller. And the thing is, there's such a genetic component involved in this. And I think we are all, our brains are pretty much the same. We've all been socialized to not like ourselves very much and to shit all over ourselves and to just not feel good about being who we are and existing in the bodies that we are existing in.

And your body is happy when it's working well and it's feeling okay. And you can't determine what size that will be.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: So that might be slightly larger than you would like for yourself. Do you know what I mean?

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Jill: Yeah. I think of every weight loss program I've ever joined that was like you need to pick a goal weight. It's always been focused on, let's pick a number on the scale that you're going to work towards. Instead of, hey, let's develop habits that make you feel good in your body and see what weight it ends up at, right?

Christine: Wouldn't that actually make more sense? Wouldn't that make more sense?

Jill: Yes, it would make much more sense, but there's no money in that.

Christine: No. And Weight Watchers, things like that, and there are other diet companies out there, Noom, and there's lots of different companies but they all make so much money.

Jill: Noom.

Christine: Don't get me started. Because people keep coming back.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: Oh, it worked for me. Yes, it worked for you, you can lose weight in the short term. That's absolutely proven. But it's not proven that you can lose weight in the long term through dieting.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: There's so much research to it, there's so much science. No science backs up that diets work.

Jill: Yeah.

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Christine: I mean it's so flimsy. And it's actually the more you – we all know this – the more you diet, the more you keep losing weight and then putting on weight is actually much worse for your health. That weight cycling, the up and down, the constant. So it's actually just better to do exactly that, just, okay, I am where I am. What would make me feel better in my body? I'd like to move my body. I'd like to feel better.

Habits are great. I'm not against sort of setting goals or building sort of habits that feel good. That's absolutely, I'm 100% for that. It's about the intention.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: I always say that I'm not against setting fitness goals, targets, all of that, running goals. But it's about the intention you're setting it with. If it's just to lose weight, it's going to be a really hollow victory because I always think when you get to that goal weight, what happens then?

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: So what happens then? You're like, "Yay, I'm at my goal weight!" But then you're terrified, "Oh, I'm going to put weight on. What do I do now?" And then if you put weight on, you feel like a failure. If you don't you're working so hard to try and maintain this weight, you're fighting, it's a no win situation.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, there's never any ease about it. It's always just this tightrope of I can't gain it back. And then when you're panicking because you think you're going to gain it back, many people will self-soothe with the very behavior that creates the result that they don't want.



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Christine: Exactly, yeah. Yeah.

Jill: It's a cruel joke, yeah.

Christine: So I've come across intuitive eating, I don't know if you know about intuitive eating. I'm sure you do.

Jill: Yes, definitely, yeah.

Christine: You know everything, Jill. You know everything. I trained to be an intuitive eating counselor last year. So I finished my training last year with Evelyn Tribole, who is fantastic.

Jill: Oh wow, yeah, I've heard of her.

Christine: She's amazing. She's the founder of Intuitive Eating along with Elyse Resch. That's all about tuning in. So that's tuning into your body and going, "Right, I'm hungry. What do I want? Do I want something crunchy? What texture do I want? Do I want crisp? Do I want chewy? Do I want soft?" It's all about really thinking about what you want.

And if you eat a load at one meal and then you feel really uncomfortably full, go, "Okay, well, maybe tomorrow." So it's just listening. Okay, I over ate there for myself, and then I didn't eat enough at this meal. So it's just learning. You can't get it wrong. You cannot. And it's just like tuning in. If I have this for breakfast, I feel really energized. But if I didn't have this, then I felt rubbish. And it's working out what works for you.

There's permission, full permission for all foods. All foods fit. There's no good or bad. And it's just transformed eating for me. It's just a joyous experience.

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Jill: I absolutely love that. Well, and can we talk about eating, because you've sort of alluded to the fact that you've kind of struggled with how you eat and how you exercise. Would you be willing to share what that's been like for you and then maybe kind of like how you've transitioned away from that?

Christine: Yeah. So I was young, I was little when I started. There's so many reasons that somebody can develop an eating disorder, they're very complex and you can't just break it down. But they generally are prompted by a diet. So diets don't cause eating disorders, but a lot of eating disorders start from a diet.

And I think it was that simple thing that I started a diet and I didn't like myself at school. I felt very shy, lots going on. Belfast, I was brought up in Belfast and the troubles when the bombs were going off and it wasn't a very safe place to be. And I think this was the control bit, I wanted to feel safe, so this was my way of controlling.

I couldn't stand myself so I started just restricting my food. And then the compliments flew in. The compliments were flying in. "Wow, have you lost weight, you look amazing?" Which is a phrase so many people use and I'm trying to discourage them from using it. Please stop, please stop using that. It's so destructive.

And the more compliments I got, the more I was like, "Right, I can stick to this. I can keep going, I can keep going." And then it gets you. Then it kind of just caught hold of me and then it was kind of years of hospital visits and just a horrible, horrible time when I was quite little. So I think I was 14 when it started. Yeah, a horrible time for me, a horrible time for my poor parents.

Jill: Yeah.

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Christine: Just awful. I remember it in a very sad way. So when I look at little pictures of me as a kid, I'm like, "Why did I put her through that?" But equally I think I have real strength because I managed to come out the other side. And so it's that kind of opposition there, that contradiction.

So then I kind of got over it. And this is what we were talking about earlier, it's the idea I restored my weight. So I got back to a straight sized body and everybody thought I was fine.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And this is, you know, we were talking about sort of atypical anorexia, if somebody's not in a tiny body they're not taken seriously. When actually, when I was in that straight, I was back, weight restored, I was so miserable. I've never been so unhappy. I was still totally struggling with binge eating disorder and then moved into orthorexia, moved into compulsive exercising.

But I looked normal, normal in inverted commas.

Jill: So when you say normal, you weren't sort of super, super thin, like somebody would think of when they think of a person who's anorexic.

Christine: So I was.

Jill: Okay.

Christine: I was when I was deep in anorexia, but once I recovered, I kind of went really low and came back to a healthy weight.

Jill: Yeah.

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Christine: I'm doing inverted commas because we all know BMI is bullshit.

Jill: Yes, I know, right? She's got like the eye roll and the air quotes going for sure.

Christine: So I got back, when I was about 20 I got back to weight restored and everybody's like, "Oh, Christine is fine now.' And that's when I was really more miserable because I got into obsessive exercising and still very controlled by the eating, using things like laxatives, just awful. Just self-destructive behaviors, really.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And it was only in my 30s when I had kids, when I had the kids it was like a wake-up call. Your behaviors are so very controlled, maybe let's not pass that on to the kids.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: So I think I had a wake up call when I saw them. And I realized I wanted something different for them. I did not want them growing up controlling every bit of food that went into their mouth and feeling like they had to run a marathon if they had a piece of cake. I didn't want that for them. I wanted them to exist in the bodies that they were in and have fun and enjoy themselves and just relax.

And I think that was my motivation to just break free and just help other people do the same.

Jill: I love that. Because as you were talking too, I was thinking to myself like on the surface it looks like it's about being a certain body size. But in

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reality, it's totally different, like that's just not the symptom. Maybe it's the symptom. Like that's just how it manifests, but it's about so much more, right?

Christine: Yes.

Jill: It's about I'm not good enough the way I am. I shouldn't be putting words in your mouth, but what do you think it was about for you, besides the body size?

Christine: So I think it was numerous things. I think it was growing up in Belfast, we were in a very troubled area.

Jill: Oh, right, yeah.

Christine: I'd come home from school and there would be kind of an army, there would be just a man, a gunman on our porch just pointing a gun at us. And there would be kind of army vehicles always around, armored cars and pegs as we called them, these big armored vehicles. And you'd just constantly see gunfire, you'd hear bombs. You would have bomb scares continually.

All the buses that we got back from school would be diverted. We'd be dropped in the middle of nowhere. We'd have no idea what we were doing. We all lost people. We had close family members shot and killed.

And, obviously, I know there's a lot going on with you guys at the minute in terms of the violence that's going on. But certainly as a kid, I never felt safe. I never felt safe at all. Helicopters as I went to sleep at night, I had helicopters just circling over our house because we were right in the middle

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of it. And that put me to sleep because they were looking for, you know, it was just not a safe place.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And I just was quite a shy kid. And then I got hit by a car when I was 11, broke my pelvis, which was quite traumatic. So I think that compounded everything.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And then a culture that tells you you're okay if you're thin.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: I used to get comments about being, oh, you're a bit chubby. So I just thought, all right, well I can't control my face and how I look, but I can control this, so I thought. I could control the body. So that was my way of coping with all the other crap that was flying around.

Jill: So it's like trauma plus shitty patriarchal messaging combined together.

Christine: Yeah, yeah. I honestly do think diet and culture is a very hard place to recover into. So I think anybody struggling with anorexia, it's very hard to recover into the dieting culture that we're in that tells you actually you just need to be smaller.

Jill: Yeah.

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Christine: And you're trying to put on weight so that you're actually restoring your health. And you're being told, no, thinner is better. Thinner is better. And it's just quite a hard place to be.

Jill: Right, because you've got all of this external messaging that is reinforcing the kind of thought errors in your brain. So you've maybe got a few people like, "No, no, no, we need to put on weight."

Christine: Exactly. Exactly.

Jill: And then like, yeah, you walk down the street and there's a billboard and a magazine, a video and Instagram and yeah.

Christine: Yeah, exactly that. Exactly that.

Jill: Yeah, so it's like the deck is really stacked against you. So you touched on something earlier where you said anorexia and eating disorders aren't necessarily, we kind of think of them as something that if you're thin, then you might have an eating disorder. That fat people don't have anorexia because you have to be a thin person to have anorexia.

And I think I'm probably not explaining this well, but can you say more about that? Because I think that if you're a fat person and you have disordered eating because of all this shitty messaging and combined with maybe some trauma in your life. And then you go to the doctor and they're just like, well, you're fat, so you obviously don't have anorexia. That can be devastating.

Christine: I mean there's so many – Eating disorders do not have a size. They do not have a size, they do not have a look. They don't discriminate.

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Jill: Thank you for saying that. Wait, let's just take a moment, eating disorders do not have a size, eating disorders do not have a look. Boom, mic drop, thank you.

Christine: No, they do not. And they do not discriminate. And when we see the images of thin white women, that's kind of the image that you start conjuring in your brain. And that's why it's really difficult for anybody in a larger body or in a straight size body who's struggling with disordered eating, because they're just not taking us seriously.

I think anorexia is the eating disorder with the highest mortality rate. But if you present in a way where you look okay from the outside, you're not going to be taken seriously. And there's a lot of campaigners working towards better outcomes for people in larger bodies, but there's a long way to go. There's an awful long way to go with that.

And yeah, that is a massive issue. It's a massive issue. But they do not discriminate, so anybody can have disordered eating and can be going through hell on a daily basis. And binge eating disorder is an eating disorder. Bulimia is an eating disorder that affects people of all sizes. Anorexia affects people of all sizes. So anorexia just means that you're restricting your calories to an amount that is just not sufficient for your body to work in a certain way.

And you need, I think if we talk about calories, we need about 1300 calories for your body just to function, the liver to function, everything else.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine So if you're restricting, you might still not be in a, you might still be overweight in terms of BMI, but you can be very unhealthy. You can be



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incredibly, you know, your systems can be failing and you need attention in the same way as somebody who's in a smaller body. So it's about the behavior, anorexia is about behavior, the restriction, the calorie intake. But it's just not seen as equal at this point, which is very sad. Very sad.

Jill: Yeah, because you even mentioned that if you're in a larger body and you're diagnosed with anorexia, it's called atypical anorexia. So it's still bothering people in larger bodies because, well, maybe you have anorexia, but you don't look like you do because you're not thin. So you don't have the right kind of anorexia. It's like that's what I hear when somebody is like, "Oh, atypical anorexia." I'm like, oh, they've basically told you that you're not even good at having anorexia. You can't even do that right.

That's what I hear just as a fat person who, I've had many, many times when I was younger thinking – It's horrible to me to realize I had those thoughts, but I wish I could just have an eating disorder so I could lose this weight. That's what the diet and fitness industry does to us. It gives us ridiculous thoughts because there are even groups to promote anorexia. It's fucking insane. Anyway, I'm getting way off topic, but it makes me insane.

Christine: And I think it's perpetuated through the fitness industry.

Jill: Yes.

Christine: I think certain places are changing and we're definitely seeing some movement in the right direction, but it's still very much focused on the size and how you look rather than what your body can do. And you cannot tell somebody's health from what they look like.

Jill: Yeah.

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Christine: And also, we were talking about healthism, that doesn't equate to value. What somebody looks like, what their health is, why they move, none of that. And I think you can get very easily sucked into I'm a good person if I do this. I'm a good person if I eat this way, if I do that.

Jill: Yeah, it's almost biblical.

Christine: There are a lot of changes to be made.

Jill: Yeah, there are. But yeah, it's like this equating you're a good person if you're working towards health. And if you're fat, you must not be working towards health and therefore you're not a good person. There's so many ways that you can come back around to it. But it really, that's it, right? It's healthism.

It's believing that your body's health is an indicator of your moral whatever, you know, your morality. Which is fucked up because what if you're the best person in the world and you get cancer? Then how do you resolve those two things?

Christine: It's the thing that thin people get ill as well. They have bad knees. The same issues affect the whole population and I think it's just, yeah, yeah, it makes me quite mad. I'm sure it does you as well.

Jill: Well, and that's why you're doing the work that you're doing, right? Is to help women kind of heal from a lot of that thinking. And you've talked a bit

—

Christine: Yeah, and I — Sorry.

Jill: No, please go.

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Christine: Sorry, Jill.

Jill: We both just have so much to say.

Christine: So much to say. I work with some people who have had disordered eating as well. And I'm not, you know, I feel really comfortable talking about that, again, because it's my lived experience. I used to do these posts that were like, "I accept my body." And I'd be showing off in a – Which I really struggle with because I'm Presbyterian. And my dad was a vicar. But we were on a crop top and going, "Look, I accept my body."

And then having talked to a lot of other fitness instructors who are plus size or in large bodies, they were like that's not actually serving people. Because you're putting yourself as, you know, what if somebody is in a larger body than you and they look like that, and you can accept yourself, but what about people who are larger?

So I stopped doing that and I just sort of did videos of myself in movement and then tried to put people who were in larger bodies in that, you know, I'd center them. I would center them. So I would maybe share a post from somebody who was actually in a larger body and had the lived experience that I didn't have.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And I talk more to the kind of toxic fitness culture, the disordered eating, the disordered exercise behaviors because that's my lived experience and I feel very much more able to speak to that. Do you see what I mean?

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Jill: Yeah. Yeah, no, I totally know what you mean. Can we talk about disordered exercise behaviors and disordered fitness behaviors, separate from eating? Because I think that that's another thing that women of all sizes can get sucked into this over exercising or compulsive exercise. And I know you have a fair amount of experience with that as well.

Christine: Yeah. And then we're talking about running, aren't we?

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: This is like a runner's podcast.

Jill: Well it is, but also strength training. I feel like it can happen with anything, right?

Christine: 100%. I was going to use my example in running. And since listening to your podcast, Jill, my motivation for running has just changed entirely. And I know we talk about motivation is bullshit. I feel like I have gotten my mojo back with running. So I just wanted to put that out there because I've given myself permission to just run and not have to think about speed or time. You know what I mean?

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: I've actually taken that pressure off, which has felt brilliant. So from that, I distanced myself from running. I took myself away from running because it was becoming punishing and I was definitely doing it to maintain a certain size or look and just to punish myself, basically.

And I'd allow myself to eat if I went for certain miles of running and I signed myself up to so many marathons. And looking back I was just not feeding

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myself, I wasn't fueling myself as much as I needed to and I was wiped out. Absolutely knackered. It had an impact on family life, it had an impact all over the place. And I wasn't feeling well.

I was getting lots of different symptoms and skin disorders, all different things because I wasn't feeding my body enough. I just wasn't giving it what it needed. And I was certainly in a much smaller body then, but I was not happy. And I think that's something to really bear in mind.

And we were talking about exercise behaviors, it's prevalent. It is so much. I see it everywhere in every gym that I'm in and amongst some of the women I teach. It's this reliance on cardio, I've got to do cardio. Oh, I'm eating cake later, so I've got to come to the gym a bit more. I've got to work harder because I'm going on holiday and I'm going to be in a swimsuit and I have to look better than I do now.

I have to make myself smaller. And it's beach body ready, if I see that again I'm going to go mad. Freaking beach body ready, we're all beach body ready now. Just put a swimsuit on and go to the beach, you're grand. But yeah, that kind of stuff.

And in fitness centers it's like you see, "Nice bum. Keep working, you'll never regret a workout. Never miss a Monday." Blah, blah, blah. And they've got images of people with their ripped abs and their muscles as if that's the only way to feel fit, or to be fit, or to be strong, and it is not.

Visible abs are not a sign of experience as an instructor. I don't have visible abs, but I'm a good instructor. So it's absolutely nothing to do with your fitness. It's a certain genetic disposition.

Jill: Yep.

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Christine: And some people you will see abs, and other people you won't. That is no measure of anything, no measure of anything. But it's presented to us as, oh, we're not quite right. And then we think the more we do it, if we just keep going, if we just keep going, then we'll be able to eat what we, you know, we'll be able to deserve our food and earn our food. And it's all tied in, I think, with the eating.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: We need to just break free from it.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And once you do, once you open your eyes, you can't close them again. So you see these messages everywhere. I'd like to know if you think that as well.

Jill: I do. I mean, now I'll be taking the train somewhere and I'll see some advertisement like, "Get your life back, join whatever, blah, blah, blah, weight loss." And I'm like, you've got a life now.

Christine: Yeah.

Jill: Nobody took it away from you, you get to just live it in the body you have right now. And this belief that your life, that being happy, that everything is waiting for you on the other side of being thin is bullshit.

Christine: Yeah.

Jill: It's so frustrating. But we are taught that from day one. Like we come out of the womb and we're just bombarded. I don't know, maybe not for the

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first six months or so. But eventually, we're just bombarded with that messaging. And I think it's really hard to undo it, especially when you've gotten yourself into that sort of treadmill of under-eating or overtraining.

Well, let me ask you this, what are some indicators that somebody might be compulsively exercising or over exercising? Whether it's running or strength training or Pilates, whatever it is. What are some indicators? So if somebody's listening to this and is like, "Well, I'm fat, so I'm obviously not exercising enough." Guess what, the two are unrelated. So how would somebody know?

Christine: So I think if there is any obsession or rigidity – How do you say that, rigidity?

Jill: Rigidity.

Christine: I just had a Diet Coke. I love Diet Coke, not because it's diet, but because I love Diet Coke.

Jill: Diet Coke tastes better than regular Coke, right?

Christine: Doesn't it?

Jill: Yeah it does.

Christine: Somebody gave me Coke Zero yesterday, and it just tastes like Coke. And it was horrible. I'm like, "No, I want Diet Coke."

Jill: It's bitter, like our hearts. That's what I always say.

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Christine: I'm like, no, Diet Coke is the way forward. Anyway, I think it was exercise, if it becomes obsessive or there's any rigidity around it, as in if your friend says, "Let's go out on Friday night." And you're like, "I've got to go to the gym. I've got to go and do a workout. I've got a class." If you feel like, but I need to do that, or if you think every day, I need to work every day or you can't relax, those are signs. Maybe you just need to step away.

I got to the point that if I didn't go running, I couldn't enjoy my day. I had to go every day and I had to run a certain distance otherwise I didn't feel good about the day or eating my meals. So that's definitely a sign.

Jill: Can I ask a clarifying question on that one?

Christine: Yeah.

Jill: So what if you're somebody who's like, "Okay, after I go for a run, physically my body feels better. I feel like I've relieved the stress." How does that fit in?

Christine: Yes, so it's about the intention. So you had Sandra, Big Fit I Run on in the last episode.

Jill: Oh, yeah.

Christine: And she's fantastic. And she's obviously got her 5k running streak or walk. Is it a walk/running streak or is it just running?

Jill: I think she does both, I think she just covers 5k on foot every day, a minimum of that. Yeah.



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Christine: And it was different for me because I still love going running, and I'll run most days because I love it.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: But if you miss a run, if for some reason – It's different if you're trying to do a streak like Sandra. That's very different. But if for some reason you can't go running and you start getting, "But I need to run." If it starts becoming panicky and if you just can't think about anything else, it's like, "But I didn't run." Then it's, right, okay, let's just take a step back.

And if you're sort of spending hours in the gym, so if you're doing maybe two workouts a day, things like that are very obvious signs. If you're extremely fatigued. As a woman if you lose your period, which can be tricky around perimenopause because our periods are erratic anyway.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: It's like, what? If your mental health is struggling, if you're very emotional. It can play out in so many different ways.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And it's just about if you're planning your life around it, rather than it being just sort of adding to your life, if you know what I mean.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And this is not to say that you can't – I love running. And I would say I'm a runner at heart, I just love it. And I do feel better after a run.

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Jill: Yeah.

Christine: And that's okay because now I can run with friends socially. I don't need to do the speed all the time. It's a different way of looking at running and you're out in the fresh air. To me it's fantastic. And that's a healthy habit, which I love. But if I can't do it, I don't panic and I don't go to extremes. And I make sure that I'm fueling enough if I am going to do those runs regularly. And it's not about punishing or looking a certain way. It's just about how your body feels.

I hear what you're saying because I never want somebody to think running every day is a bad thing. If you're running every day and you're feeling good in your body. Do you know what I mean?

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: You're fueling well.

Jill: I think that's it. It's like you said, it's the intention behind it, right? And so if your intention is, if I don't run I've failed today.

Christine: Yes.

Jill: If you're starting to have thoughts like, if I don't get this run in I've wasted today, or I've missed my chance. Or if you're realizing it's 11 o'clock at night and you should be in bed, but you're like, "Oh, I didn't run today, I better get on the treadmill," right?

Christine: Yeah.

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Jill: Yeah, because I think a lot of folks who are training for races will arrange their whole schedule because they're like, "Well, I've got to run 10 miles on Saturday. So I'm not going to go out on Friday night, and I am going to rearrange my whole schedule around it." But I think it's a different mindset than the one that you're speaking of.

Christine: Yeah, and exactly, it gets a bit blurry there. But that's setting a goal. And races are goals that we set and we work towards them. To me, it's brilliant. So I've got a couple just because I like having a race to kind of train for. But in doing that, I will make sure I'm fueling my body. And that's the goal. What's my intention behind that goal? It's because it's something that I want to achieve. I want to run 10k, I want to run a half marathon, I want to go to Berlin and run a marathon.

Those are goals that I have. But why? So it's not because I want my body to stay a certain way. It's because I want to feel good. I want to feel energized. I want to support my body through perimenopause and beyond. And I want to make sure I'm fueled, I'm happy. And if I get injured, I would – I think it's that also, if you regularly get injured, that could be due to overtraining and under-fueling and not doing your strength training.

It's just finding that, I hate the word balance, it's more about the intention than anything else.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: So I knew that I was punishing myself with running, so I stepped back. And, honestly, since finding you I've dipped back in more and I've actually loved it. I've absolutely loved it and it's very different. I don't feel like, oh no, I can't eat. I eat before, I eat after, I eat during, it's not about

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that anymore. It's just about actually how it makes you feel, which is what it's all about.

Jill: I love that. It's just about how it makes you feel. Honestly, I think if more people had that approach to running, people would find themselves being a lot more consistent with running, instead of stopping and starting. Because it does seem to me that if running is punishment, or if running is something that you have to do so that you can feel like you're doing the right thing, those thoughts lead us to feel very disempowered and lead us to kind of be sort of stop and start and find excuses not to run and so forth. Even though we know we want to do it.

So I love it. It's just about how it makes you feel.

Christine: Yeah, if you hate it, if you really don't like it because you're punishing yourself, it's not going to feel good. That's not going to feel good. You've got to start giving yourself permission to actually enjoy a run and go at the pace you want. And to walk. And to walk, you can even walk.

Jill: I know, we get to walk.

Christine: You don't have to keep running.

Jill: Let's apply that –

Christine: I had your voice in my head, I just did the marathon and I have to say it was awful. And I had your voice, your podcast in my head that you did, you started a marathon and stopped after 17 miles, I think.

Jill: Yeah.

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Christine: And at 17 miles I was like, “I need to stop.” And I always give myself, I was like, “It’s okay, Jill says I’ve got permission to stop.”

Jill: Yeah, you always do.

Christine: I know. I didn’t because I thought actually, I’ll keep going.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: But afterwards, it was that kind of, I didn’t run for time. So this marathon, I did not run for time. And I walked a lot. So in the second half of the marathon, I walked a lot. I ran a bit and then I walked, and then I ran a bit. And that would have been unheard of for me five years ago.

Jill: Oh my gosh.

Christine: I would have felt like I’d failed. Whereas now I’m like, “Yeah, I’m walking because I’m knackered. I’m just going to walk for a bit.” So, yeah, so thank you, Jill.

Jill: Oh, you’re welcome. It’s very freeing, isn’t it? I want to take that concept and talk about it in the frame of strength training, because really that’s what you do with your folks, is help them get strong, flexible, and so forth. And I think that a lot of people believe like, okay, well, strength training you have to go to the gym, and you have to have a routine, and you have to lift really heavy and you have to do all these things.

And I mean, is that the way we should be approaching strength training? Or is there a different way to make it work for you if your desire is not to deadlift 250 pounds? What other things can we do? What way can you

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approach strength training that you might apply the same principles as running?

Christine: You have such good questions, I love it. So for me, and I realized this is why I love kettlebells and working at home so much, it's because COVID. Remember COVID? Do you remember that awful three years?

Jill: COVID what?

Christine: Yeah, you couldn't go to gyms.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: You didn't have access to all the machines. And there's something about having to go somewhere and sit on a very fixed machine or barbell et cetera, that I find if you don't have access to it, then what do you do? So, to me, I just want to make strength accessible and flexible. And you can do it from home. Do you know what I mean?

So for me, free weights work for me because I love a kettlebell. But also you can have a kettlebell in your house quite easily and hide it away. It doesn't have to take over the whole house. And it's just about strengthening your muscles. So you're getting into that sort of progressive overload, certainly, but just you want to feel the work. You want to feel the muscles work to support you when you're running, basically.

And I advise newcomers to strength training to do maybe 20 minutes, twice a week. Get with a trainer and work out a plan. 20 minutes twice a week is a great way to start. And actually, even once a week until you get your head around it and then maybe add another one in. But just make it fit into your life.

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Jill: Yeah.

Christine: Because if you have to go to the gym and the gym is half an hour away, and you can only go at six o'clock on a Friday, it's not going to happen. It's just not. And you're going to find excuses. It has to be able to fit into your life. It has to be accessible and flexible. So that's just my take on it.

I know some people love gyms and I'm not against gyms. I like a gym visit myself now and again. It's that idea of having what you need where you are. And resistance bands are a great way to start and then slowly build it up, so getting the weights. And then when they become really not challenging any more then upping the weight slightly.

And you don't have to spend your life doing it. You don't have to go and lift 250 pound barbells above your head. That's not what strength training is for everybody.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: So I always say strength training looks different for everybody.

Jill: Oh yes.

Christine: It looks different for everybody. And I think that's another thing the fitness industry does, if you're not lifting this way or doing this particular workout, you're not strength training. But that's a myth. It's not true.

Jill: Yeah, exactly. Strength training is literally any way that you train your muscles to get stronger, right?

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Christine: Yes.

Jill: So that could be a kettlebell. It could be a resistance band. It could be using the machines at the gym. I know some people like the structure of the gym.

Christine: 100%.

Jill: And other people are like, I hate the structure of the gym, right? And so I think, like what you said, just finding the way that it feels good to you.

And then have you ever worked with anybody that has been compulsive with their strength training the way people – I feel like when I think about compulsive exercise, I think about cardio, usually. But do you find that it happens also with strength training? And if so, what might that look like? Or what might be some of the results of overtraining when it comes to strength training?

Christine: Strength. No, that's a really interesting one because it happens very rarely, from my own experience, because it's that deprioritizing strength in favor of cardio.

So if I use a real life example, I teach boot camps. I've got two a week and they're so much fun. I love the women that come, it's just one of the highlights of my week. But so many of them, I bang on about strength training every single time I'm there. Because people are like, oh, I'm injured. My knee hurts. My hip hurts. My shoulders hurt. And I'm like, you've got to be doing strength training, lady. And they're very much prioritizing cardio.

Jill: Yeah.



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Christine: That's what they want to do. The cardio, the cardio, the cardio, because that's how they feel they're going to maintain or they're going to keep looking a certain way. And that's the bit that you have to break through.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: So I definitely, from my experience, I'm with you on that. It seems that because society is telling you that's the way to lose weight, so do that one.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: Women worry about, again, in my experience, talking about experience, women worry about getting bulky. And that is not, I'll just break that myth down. It's very freaking hard to build muscle. It takes a long time. It takes working out in a very specific way for a very long period of time. It's actually very hard to do.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: So, first of all, I'd be incredibly impressed if you got bulky. But second of all, it's near impossible unless you are a bodybuilder or training in a very specific way.

Jill: And the way you have to eat to build muscle, right?

Christine: Yes.

Jill: You're like, okay, are you eating an entire chicken every day? Right? Because it takes so much protein. So yeah, it's not going to happen.

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Christine: When we're sort of approaching, I said we, I'll talk about me. Because I'm 47, nearly, and very much in perimenopause. So we start losing muscle mass and bone density at an accelerated rate. So it's actually about maintenance. If anything else we're trying to maintain the muscle we have. But in terms of what it would look like would be, again, just spending long periods of time at the gym or doing strength every day.

So strength is slightly different from running, your body actually needs time to rest and adapt to the exercise that you've done. So I would say if you are strength training every single day of the week, that's a flag. And if you, again, it's that rigidity. If you become obsessed with it. It's just about exactly the same, spending the hours in the gym, your mental health suffering, your emotional suffering, you're just feeling rigid and trapped and that you have to go. I think that's definitely an indicator.

Jill: Yeah, I would agree. And if you do, if you find yourself getting – Again, if you find yourself getting injured, because strength training is there to support your activities of daily living, whether that's running or chasing your kids around or what have you. And if you're injuring yourself through strength training, you can't do your life. That's just very counterproductive.

Christine: And I think you can replace, you can sort of start getting obsessed by the number that you're lifting.

Jill: Yep.

Christine: So you can kind of divert your attention from the scale to, oh, I'm lifting this and I've got to lift this. And I've got to keep going. It's good to have a goal, but it's how you're approaching that. So there's nuance there, but it's definitely about how you're feeling. If you're feeling panicky and

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anxious or if you're feeling good and you're enjoying the experience, that's very different.

Jill: Yeah. Something you said just kind of sparked something. I can imagine somebody is like, "Okay, well, I'm not going to be counting calories anymore and I'm not going to be obsessed with the number on the scale." And it's very easy to transfer that over to, "Okay, well, now I'm going to be obsessed with strength training because that's okay. It's not compulsive if it's strength training." Right?

Just noticing that sort of transference and thinking that like, well, strength training is good for me. So we're just kind of moving the, what was the term you used? Orthorexia? Orthorexia is like an obsession with healthy habits, like just moving it from place to place.

Christine: Yeah.

Jill: Fascinating.

Christine: And I think that's such an easy thing to do. So you're thinking, "Okay, fair enough. I'm doing cardio too much." And then it's just noticing those patterns. And it's very common, just not beating yourself up. If you do notice that you're exercising compulsively, don't beat yourself up. Because I think it's about we're so hard on ourselves, it's the culture we're living in.

Jill: Yeah.

Christine: Take it easy on yourself. It's not your fault.

Jill: It's like of course you're doing it, right? It makes perfect sense. It makes perfect sense.

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Christine: Yeah.

Jill: Well I just want to say thank you so much for this conversation today because, first of all, I learned a lot. And I think a lot of folks that are listening did as well. Where can people find you? How can people work with you and get to know you more?

Christine: I love this question. I used to hang out on Facebook, Jill, but I don't anymore. I'm just going to be honest.

Jill: Okay.

Christine: I hang out on Instagram. So you can find me at @HelloFitnessChristine. My website is HelloFitnessChristine, so I'm trying to keep it nice and consistent.

Jill: Yes.

Christine: And the podcast is, as you said, *Find Your Strong*. But people can work with me, I've got a couple of online courses which are really affordable and they're about beginning strength. So Kettlebells Made Easy. Or if you want to work with me in a kind of more one to one way I do PT In My Pocket, which is just kind of a bespoke program through an app and you get access to lots of classes and you get workouts for me every week and message support every day. So that's another way.

Jill: Nice, I love that.

Christine: Yeah.

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Jill: Okay, so please, everyone, follow Christine's Instagram, it is amazing. Check out her classes, her offerings, because she is the real deal. And she has been where you have been. She knows. She knows all the struggles.

Because I think it's important to work with a coach who understands what you're dealing with and what you're going through, and who isn't going to be like, "Just work harder" or whatever. You're like, no, I get it. I understand what it's like to have an eating disorder. I understand what it's like to over exercise. I know what it's like to be socialized in the world that we live in where we're just taught that smaller is better.

And I think, like you said, when you've opened your eyes, you can't re-close them. And so I think working with a coach that understands you and has gone through the same struggles as you is really, really important. So thank you for sharing everything today. And I want everybody to make sure that they check you out. And all right.

Christine: I had the best time. And I'm sorry, I'm fueled by caffeine, I couldn't stop talking, Jill.

Jill: I love it. All the talking, all the talking. It's so good. I love it. All right.

Christine: Thank you for having me. I've honestly loved it, thank you.

Jill: Thank you for being here.

Real quick, before you go, if you enjoyed this episode you have to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to [runyourbestlife.com](http://runyourbestlife.com) to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.