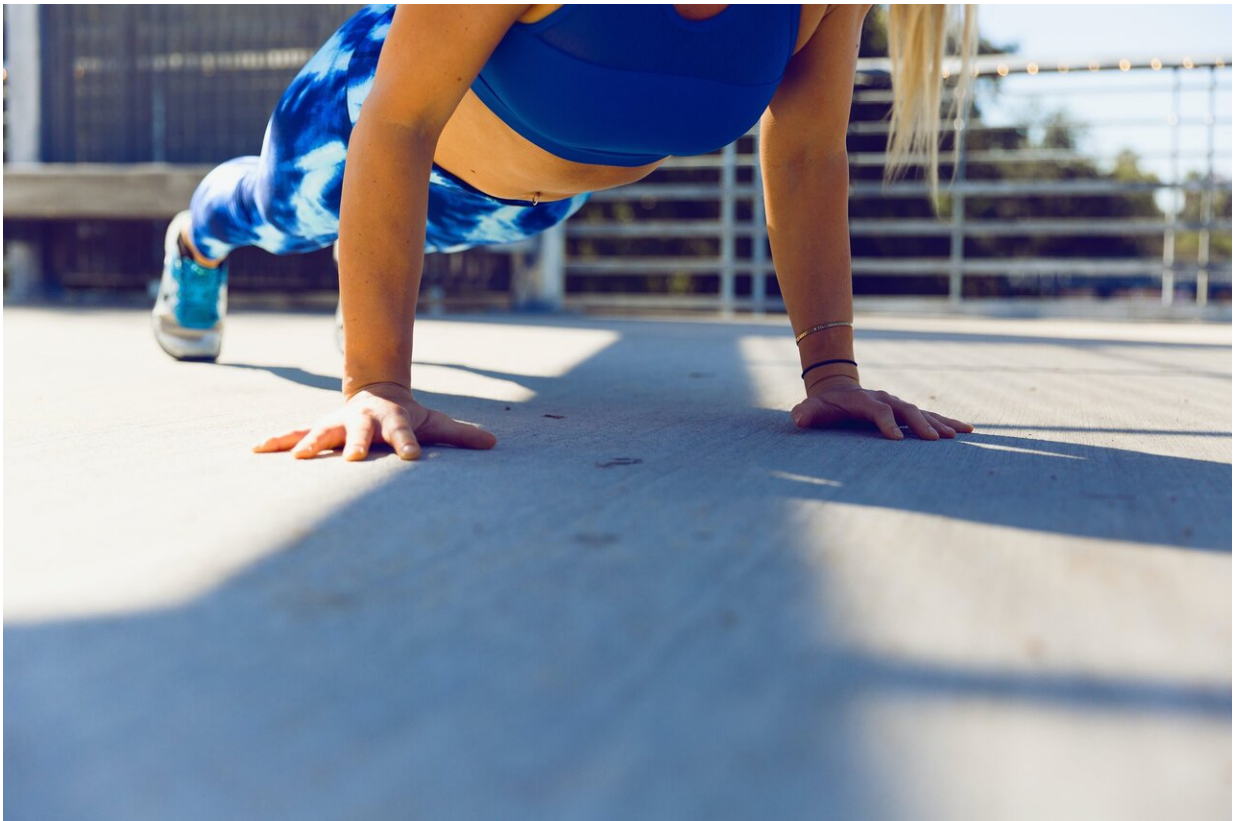


How exercise can support eating disorder recovery

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Research led by Dr. Hester Hockin-Boyers (Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences), suggests that combining seemingly opposing approaches to health management could support eating disorder

recovery. The research is [published](#) in the journal *Sociology of Health & Illness*.

Intuition versus tracking

For people recovering from an [eating disorder](#), exercise can be a complex area of [health management](#).

They are often encouraged to take an intuitive approach—focusing on body-awareness and self-understanding, while avoiding overly controlled behaviors.

However, wider [public health](#) messaging often promotes detailed tracking –from counting our daily steps to our [calorie intake](#).

The result? A potentially confusing landscape of mixed health-management messages for those recovering from eating disorders.

But do the two approaches really need to be viewed as opposites, or is there a way for them to both to aid recovery?

A third option

The new study, which also involved Dr. Kimberly Jamie (Sociology Department) and Professor Stacey Pope (Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences), focused on a small sample of women using weightlifting to support their recovery from an eating disorder.

Weightlifting is an interesting vehicle to eating disorder recovery as it emphasizes healthy weight-gain and an understanding of the body and its capabilities.

The [research](#) team found that, in this group, women were successfully mixing intuitive and tracking-led health management practices.

They suggest that practitioners working in eating disorder recovery should consider a third, mixed approach to health management—which she terms "intuitive tracking."

Intuitive tracking

People in recovery from eating disorders often have a deep understanding of the effects of food and exercise on their body. But, this knowledge can feel detrimental to recovery.

An intuitive-tracking approach enables individuals to use this knowledge in a positive way, while also engaging in intuitive techniques to remain in recovery.

This was demonstrated by the women participating in the study. They were able to balance tracking-based techniques, such as exercise and eating plans, to support their weightlifting goals, with the need for rest and recovery.

For those with eating disorders, and professionals involved in their treatment, "intuitive tracking" could offer a new approach for those who struggle with intuitive-based methods alone.

"In suggesting a mixed 'intuitive tracking' approach, the hope is that those who treat and support people in [recovery](#) from eating disorders can consider this as a new tactic, to help those for whom a solely intuitive-based approach is less effective," says Dr. Hester Hockin-Boyers.

More information: Hester Hockin-Boyers et al, Intuitive tracking: Blending competing approaches to exercise and eating, *Sociology of*

Health & Illness (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/1467-9566.13821](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13821)

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