

Moving With More Freedom

Learn To Regulate Your Intensity & Your Tension

Contents of this training:

#RegulateYourself manual

Including:

- exercises to explore your current relationship to intensity and tension
- clear education on the variables that influence your ability to move, feel, and perform well, and how to start influencing them in yourself
- guidance to assist you as you move into new territory in your relationship to intensity and tension



70 minute Moving With More Freedom video workshop

Including:

- movement explorations to bring the lessons into your own body
- expanded discussion of four crucial variables that you can influence as you expand your relationship to intensity and tension

#RegulateYourself Manual

Section One: Efficiency Without Unnecessary Tension

It can feel so frustrating to feel like every time you ramp up the intensity of your workouts, you get hurt. It's also super frustrating to be on the other end of the spectrum - feeling as if you're stuck - like if you don't "go hard" all the time then surely you'll lose all of the gains you've made so far.

Knowing how to regulate the amount of intensity and tension you use, in not just your workouts but your daily life as well, grants you so much more freedom...

You get actual increases in how much freedom of movement you have.

You get greater amounts of injury resistance so that you can keep at the activities you enjoy doing, without chronic injuries pulling you off track.

You get to know how to sustain results without needing to fear that any letting off on the gas will destroy everything.

You get to feel more "on the same team" with your body, as you move through workouts and life.

Being an excellent caretaker of your body is a multi-part process. In addition to selecting movements and exercises that help your body, you'll need to tune in to the intensity, efficiency, tension, and awareness,

you bring to your movement and exercise time.

Feeling good and moving well is rooted in performing efficient movement without unnecessary effort or tension when it isn't needed.

Too often, folks don't know how to use the varying degrees of intensity that the human body has the potential to access. And this can influence the net effect of how your body feels. "Going hard" all the time wastes unnecessary energy and teaches your soft tissues to hold more tension than is necessary, which influences their ability to function healthfully.



Conversely, never ramping up intensity also has repercussions. There are times in life when you need to tap into your upper end intensity levels - to move a heavy object whether in training or in life, to deal with a stressful situation, to strive for the finish line of a big project you're working on at work...

If you only have two access points to intensity and tension - 0% or 100% - your integration of how your nervous system handles your joints and tissues is going to be compromised, and that influences how you move, feel, and perform.

A few symptoms of poorly controlled intensity and tension are: chronic muscle tension, overuse or misuse injuries, sleep changes, jaw and facial muscle issues, feelings of high stress, and symptoms of a sympathetic dominance.

Section Two: Rigid Like A Robot

Knowing how to regulate the amount of intensity you use also allows you to direct your energy to exactly where you want it and when.

As my good friend and colleague, Dr. Seth Oberst puts it: "it's our ability to inhibit a conditioned habit that enables people to have options, a choice, in how they move and behave. So many people struggle to maintain a proactive, rather than reactive, neurological state and are literally stuck moving and behaving compulsively in an environment that is running the show. And when our behavioral options are narrow, so too is our function and performance."

Rigid movement and fixed patterns can be problematic for your body. The perfectly aligned "good form" squat you learned in the gym is different from the squat you'll do when scooping up kids' toys or grocery bags from the ground.

If your system doesn't have enough play in it to allow for adequate movement variability, you can't adapt, shift, or adjust, as well. Conversely, if your system is too rigid to allow for much movement variability, your options for movement and adjustment will be slim and robot-like.

That phrase 'movement variability' might be new for you, so it's important that we do a quick primer on the concept...

Movement Variability

Here's the best explanation of it I've ever heard, said by Nikolai Bernstein: "*Movement variability is repetition without repetition.*" With every movement you do, you never do it exactly the same way twice, even though it might look the same to the naked eye.

With a squat, you'll load the lateral fibers of your quadriceps just a bit more on this rep, you'll flex your knee just a fraction of a second sooner than last time, you'll brace your lower back with just a bit more force than the previous squat, and so on. Tiny shifts, tiny adjustments, more access to the potential for pain-free movement...

When your body is a flexible system that can adapt and adjust to minute changes in your environment, you are better able to disperse load and tension across tissues in your body, instead of repeatedly loading the same ones over and over again.

When your body is an overly rigid, robot-like system, your adaptability to your environment is reduced. You're less capable of handling small perturbations, such as those associated with unhealthy pathological states or absence of skillfulness.

We could spend hours just discussing movement variability, but to get the main point across for this point in the conversation (we expand on

movement variability quite a bit in the video training) - if you use too much tension to do a movement, you have a smaller circle with which to expand into to make those micro-adjustments in your movement. And if you use too little tension to do a movement, you increase the chance of doing a poorly organized movement that could load the tissues with greater force than they are prepared to handle.

Section Three: The Range Between 100% And 0%

Evolution granted you the ability to use all of the levels of tension and intensity between 0% and 100%. Your body is capable of generating tension and intensity at 50%, 72%, 34%, you get the idea... the ability to tap into such a variety of levels of tension wouldn't have stuck around from an evolutionary perspective if it wasn't useful. But when you lack control of your tension and intensity, you lose capacity to move and function well.

Everything you do, or don't do, teaches your body how you'd like it to respond and adapt. What fires together wires together, so once you know how to use lots of tension, you'll start leaning into "use lots of tension" more frequently, until it becomes your default response to any situation, whether "lots of tension" is required or not.

And so, when you use too much tension to do a movement, you're teaching your tissues to hold more tension than is necessary in the future. When you use too little tension to do something, you increase the chance of one of your joints not being braced well to sustain the load that you're about to put on your body.



How much intensity
should I send out?
How much tension do
you need for this?



This is why exercise selection is not the sole ingredient in the “feel good, move well, tap into your true potential” equation.

Your nervous system needs education and guidance on *how much* tension and intensity you’d like to use in each situation you find yourself in. Here is an example to expand on this point: Thing back to when you were a child in school learning to write the alphabet...

Do you remember practicing printing the letters on your paper? Then you’ll remember how the force with which you pressed your pencil on the paper mattered. You couldn’t press too hard or your pencil tip would rip the paper. And if you pressed too softly, you wouldn’t make a dark enough mark to display the letter you intended to write. In addition, how tightly or loosely you gripped the pencil mattered to the effectiveness of your printing on the paper.

It wasn’t just about knowing which letter you were intending to write. You had to get the intensity and tension in the optimal range in order for “writing the letters of the alphabet” to go well for you.

Your body experiences something similar. How much tension do you

need to hold to do that squat, to pick up the laundry basket, to drive your car, to wait in line at the bank? How much intensity do you need to bring to your current environment - be it training time, morning movement time, evening walk time, competition day for your sport, or any other environment you find yourself in with your body?

Section Four: Becoming Aware

The starting point for bringing this concept into your own body is *awareness*. Even before beginning drills, exercises, and training, for improving your regulation of your intensity and your tension - is awareness. You can influence what you are aware of, you cannot what you are not.

Begin by becoming aware of the tension and intensity you use and where you put it in your body. Start waking up to what parts of the spectrum of intensity and tension you're accessing, and which you're avoiding altogether.

In doing this, you begin expanding your circle, pushing out into areas where you previously had no awareness. With better awareness, you will become more resourceful with your body making every movement or exercise you layer on to your body in the future, better. By developing your awareness of intensity and tension, you become able to tap into just enough of the tension you need, exactly where you need it, and become fully adaptable to the unexpected changes that are bound to show up in your environment.

The Story Of The Water Pitcher shows one example of how I personally learned I was using excess tension where it wasn't necessary:

I have a water pitcher that I fill my water bottle from several times a day. As I was practicing bringing awareness further into my daily life, I chose that task to practice awareness with. become conscious of what kind of tension I was holding and where in my body that tension was. I began noticing that every time I stood at the counter pouring the water from the pitcher, instead of just raising my arm and flexing my wrist to pour the water into my bottle, I was actually tilting my torso over to the side and twisting just a bit. To do this, I needed to lean on one hip more than the other, rotate my torso, and laterally flex the muscles of my side and back as I did so.

Once I became conscious of this, my first thought was, *"how odd...do I need to do all that weight shifting and torso leaning and twisting to fill the pitcher or can I just do it with my arm?"* So I began to explore that. When it was time to fill my bottle, I'd consciously place my feet evenly weighted underneath me, I'd keep my torso stacked vertically, and I'd raise my arm to pour from the pitcher. Turns out, I can indeed fill my water bottle without the hip shifting, lateral leaning, and flexing of my torso to pour the water - and it wasn't any more physically difficult to simply raise my arm and flex my wrist since I was already doing those two motions before in addition to the tilting of my torso.

So I began consciously practicing the action of pouring the water using only the movement, intensity, and tension, that was vital to the task at hand. In time, this became my new 'new normal'.

Take Action Worksheet

To begin exploring your own levels of intensity and tension, go through the following questions, noting your responses either in your mind, or in a journal if you do well with seeing your thoughts down on paper.

What is your Water Pitcher Story? Is it while sitting in the car you realize you're holding a lot of tension in some part of your body for what seems to be no particular reason? Is it while lying in bed you notice that you're flexing your neck muscles intensely, almost as if you don't trust the floor that is under you? Begin taking a look around your daily life, your workouts, even your "chill" time - notice how you're doing what you're doing, and start asking, "*do I need to do it that way?*"

What are your face and neck doing right now? Can you imagine what it would feel like to sense your forehead widening just a bit as you are aware of it? Can you imagine what it would feel like to sense the area around your eyes getting just a bit more spread out?

Have you breathed lately? It might sound silly, but if you've learned to restrict your breathing to only shallow-level breathing, perhaps because you grew up hearing that you should suck your belly in, or because you got into a higher-stress state at one time and never fully downshifted out of it...whatever the reason, it may have been awhile since your last truly deep breath. If you're not sure of the last time you noticed your belly rise and fall from a truly deep breath, tune into your torso and watch it as you let it rise more fully with oxygen as you inhale. Notice without judgement how that feels. So, instead of "*this feels challenging, I must be bad*", simply notice, "*this feels challenging*", or whatever it is that you notice.

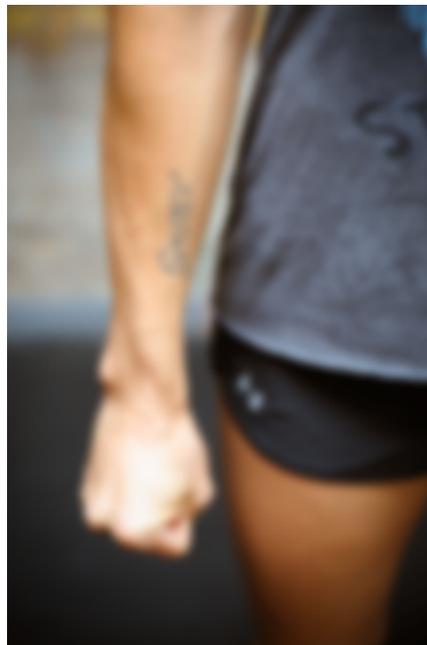
Can you notice other areas of your body right now or is your attention glued to one spot? Often, when you've been in pain, or have felt betrayed by a part of your body, you tend to focus in like a laser beam on that one area. Which is understandable if it's pain at the moment, however, by staying in 'narrow focus' on a part of your body, you actually inhibit your brain's ability to put that thing into perspective. Narrow focus makes whatever you're focusing on much larger than it actually is. See if you can shift your focus into something more diffuse, where you can become aware of other parts of your body beyond the one area your attention was glued on.

Section Five: Fighting With Your Body

Karen would try to ramp up the intensity, amount, or type, of movement or exercise she was doing, and it seemed like she got hurt every time she did so. When the injuries or setbacks would happen, she felt let down by her body and she was angry at whatever invisible force was preventing her from doing the things everyone else seemed to be able to do. When we began working together, she wasn't totally convinced yet that her body was actually capable of working at other intensities without some ache or issue popping up...

Perhaps Karen's story resonates with your own experience - or - maybe you resonate more with my personal story of intensity and fighting with my body...

For most of my life, I had access to only two levels of intensity - 100% and "sick in bed because I went too hard". I exercised with intensity. I tackled work goals with intensity. I showed up with intensity in my relationships with other humans.



Where my client, Karen, felt stuck at a low level of intensity and output, I was stuck in the opposite end - with massive amounts of intensity and no access to anything less than that.

I remember clearly the day my doctor said to me as we were discussing my action plan for addressing some health hurdles I was failing to get over, *"maybe you could ease up on the running and exercising and work, and go relax a bit?"* I looked at him like he had grown three heads.

"That's ridiculous," I said.

Because I was still seeing intensity as something binary - on or off, "go hard" or "go home", all or nothing. What would I do, how would I work, how would I keep up, if I didn't go at 100%? Because remember, my only other option at the time was 0%.

Quite a limiting stance to take, but here's the thing, you only do things a certain way because they serve you to do them that way. And it served me to go at 100% intensity. Until it didn't...via injuries, stress, mistakes, chronic tension, and suffering.

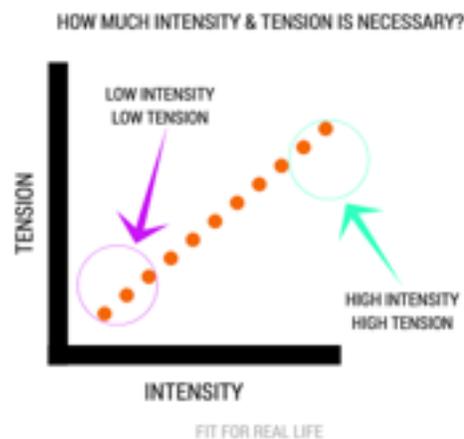
Section Six: Go Hard Or Go Home... Or Go To The Middle Ground

Intensity and tension in your soft tissues are intimately connected. As we've been discussing already, when you ramp up intensity in movement, exercise, training, or sports, you also ramp up tension in your

soft tissues. Imagine trying to run for your life with muscles as un-tense as when you're laying by the pool on vacation...not so much, right?

Ramping up tension and intensity is a useful thing when the intensity and tension you generate **suits the task you're facing**.

It's a less-useful thing when the intensity and tension you generate **does not match what is required for the task at hand**, or, when you **remain in the high-intensity/high tension state after the need to do so has ended**.



If you're cooking dinner at the stove, and you find yourself closer to the green circle than the purple one, you may want to explore why that is...

Despite the fact that fitspo memes on social media are perpetually pushing a message that hints that 'going hard' or 'going home' are the only two options you have, most of your movement, exercise, training, and living time, is meant to be lived in the space between 'going hard' and 'going home' - in the middle ground between 'all' or 'nothing'.

Thanks to hormesis, the effects of intense exercise and high tension are

dependent on the dosage. And it's not a case of "more equals better."

Exercise is a stressor on your body, and like all stressors, there is a top-end where effectiveness maxes out. Anything beyond that not only does not provide a positive net-effect, it can actually create a negative response that leaves you in negative net-effect territory.

Tension is a valuable tool for your body. Without it, you'd never be able to get yourself up out of bed in the morning, or do anything else in your life. But both 'too much' and 'too little' tension creates a host of side effects that can create pain and frustration that you can't do what you want to do.

Having play in the system allows you have options, and options allow you to have freedom.



Section Seven: How To Expand The Options Available To You

If all you've ever known is the level of intensity you currently operate at, or the amount of tension you're currently holding in your body, it can feel frustrating trying to figure out how to start down a new path. Thankfully, there is a place where you can begin, and no matter where you're coming from, it will work for you.

The conscious, controlled, environment of your our movement/exercise is one of the very best places to learn how to regulate your intensity and tension. In your training environment, you are deliberate, thoughtful, you focus on feeling various muscles contract, *you practice*. In your real life, things happen so quickly you don't have time to stop, think, plan, and ensure you're exerting the right amount of force from the right muscles. *You simply execute*. And, you'll execute using whatever you've taught yourself to do during your training time.

Your movement/training time is where you have the opportunity to practice many vital aspects of moving well and feeling great...there are four in particular that I want to draw out in this discussion on creating movement freedom through varying levels of intensity and tension.

Four Awesome Results From Using Your Movement/Training Time To Regulate Your Intensity:

1. Better signal and focus of your neural drive to your tissues

Neural drive is the contraction your muscles make. "Muscles receive a

neural activation signal from the pool of innervating motor neurons (Heckman & Enoka, 2004). This neural signal is the sum of the spiking activities of motor neurons and is referred to as neural drive to the muscle.”

You can increase the amount of neural drive you send to your tissues, which can help you improve your mobility, control, and strength.

2. Help yourself kick back into your parasympathetic nervous system

You have two arms of your autonomic nervous system - sympathetic (SNS) and parasympathetic (PNS). Your SNS is your fight/flight (or freeze) response. It ramps up tension, stress, blood pressure, and readiness for fighting, flighting, or freezing - the three things you do when your SNS gets activated. Your PNS is where your body is intended to live most of the time - in the rest and digest response - where the body can recover, restore, and create.

Learning to regulate the balance between both systems helps your body to feel, move, and perform, well.

3. Better intention for the intensity and tension you use

What you think about, your body responds to. The placebo effect is an excellent example of thought influencing the physical response in your body. Intensity and tension only work well when you have a strong ability to regulate them.

By having better intention for the amount and direction of your intensity and tension, you increase the accuracy of your movements, what tissues you brace and when, and how you organize your movements.

4. Improved movement variability

Remember, one way to think of movement variability is 'repetition without repetition' (Nikolai Bernstein). You will do ten squats in a row and they will look fairly similar to the naked eye, but each squat has micro-shifts happening each time in the joints and tissues of your body, making no two squats exactly the same.

The more movement variability you have, the more options you have for dispersing load throughout your soft tissues and joints.

Did you have any idea that your movement/training time was so rich with opportunity for gains to be made?

If you're coming from the space of feeling adversarial with your body because it never seems to hold up for you as you ramp up intensity, it's empowering to think that you can start building a better, friendlier, relationship with your body - as teammates instead of as adversaries.

If you're coming from the space of feeling like you must hang on at 100% intensity or else all will be lost, it's fascinating to consider that you can let go of some of the tension and intensity and still feel, move, and perform, well.

But a word of caution, this is not an overnight thing. Lightbulbs may be clicking on for you right now, and that's wonderful that they are, but they may need to be clicked on a few more times as you start teaching your body new signals, and receiving from it new responses. When it comes to your biology, nothing is permanent and nothing happens overnight.

It took plenty of practice for me to start living more in the “middle ground” than in the world of “max intensity”, and still there are moments and days where I need to remind myself I can live in the wide array of intensities and tension that make up the middle ground, and simply visit the land of max intensity every now and again.

As I teach my clients, yours is a story that is being told every single day. Months - years! - into it the story unfolds further. You become newly aware of places you are carrying excess tension. You discover how to access the next 5% of intensity-modulation. You start understanding how contracting your muscle at 20% feels compared to 25%. You wake up to the reality that you can contract a muscle you previously couldn't understand how to flex.

The curtain pulls back. The story expands. You gain more freedom.

In learning to regulate yourself, you not only expand your ability to feel and move well, you increase your injury-resistance, you get stronger, you become more graceful, you learn about yourself, and you have new experiences of your Self and the world around you. Pretty rad.

If you haven't already done so, now is the time to view the Move With More Freedom video workshop that accompanies this manual. The movement experiences I guide you through in the workshop will present you with opportunities to start down the path of understanding, adjusting, and expanding, the range of intensities and tension you have access to. The worksheet below accompanies the video workshop.

Take Action Worksheet

Knowledge + action = something is going to change. You've already begun expanding your knowledge by choosing to learn about regulating your intensity and tension. The movement experiences I teach you in the video workshop will help you take action. I've put what I consider important points into this worksheet for you to fill in, but feel free to add in your own notes as well.

What is neural drive? Why is "glute amnesia" not accurate for what that phrase is referring to?

How does muscle tension relate to the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS)?

How does having better intention for your intensity and your tension help you have better workouts? What does intention do for your adaptability to your environment (both internal and external environments)?

What is one way that your movement variability can shrink?

Movement Experience One: What does NEAT stand for? Why is NEAT movement so beneficial? Did anything interesting come up for you as we did the NEAT movement (thoughts of "this can't possibly be effective"?, fear?, relief?, pleasure?, resistance?)

Movement Experience Two: What was your experience of creating the co-contraction throughout your body? What happened to your breath as you held the co-contraction?

Movement Experience Three: Were you able to maintain the co-contraction as you moved your arm? What was it like in your mind as you did this (confusing to manage it all?, wonderfully calm?) What was it like in your body (did you notice yourself starting to clench your jaw? hold your breath? forget everything?)

Movement Experience Four: When you contracted your thigh muscles, what happened when you attempted to find the various percentages I encouraged you to move through? Could you find some percentages but not others? How did you do ramping up and ramping down?