

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #28

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Karen Preene

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** It's time for Episode 28 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast and today I'm featuring Karen Preene. Karen is a non-diet, Health At Every Size aligned personal trainer and business owner, who is aiming to help people discover the joy of movement. She and I chatted about some of the differences between mainstream fitness professionals and HAES fitness professionals, why sometimes the healthiest thing a person can do is stop exercising entirely, what the heck joyful movement even is, and more.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/28](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/28). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/28](https://shohrehdavoodi.com/28).

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Hey y'all, welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. I'm a certified intuitive eating counselor, and a certified personal trainer. I help people improve their relationships with exercise, food, and their bodies, so they can ditch diet culture for good, and do what feels right for them.

Through this podcast I want to give you the tools to redefine what health and wellness mean to you. By exposing myths and misconceptions, delving into all the areas of health that often get ignored, and reminding you that health and wellness are not moral obligations. Are you ready? Let's fuck some shit up.

Hey y'all, today on the podcast I have my internet friend, Karen Preene, better known as 'Deadlifts and Red Lips' on Instagram. We have kind of a funny story of how we met online because we actually originally started following each other a few years back when I was under the 'Glitter and Grit' handle, and when my business was not specifically Health At Every Size, body positive, etc.

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And at the time Karen was not a fitness professional, she just followed different fitness accounts. So, it just makes me laugh that we knew each other as two very different people and then we started following each other again in realizing that now we're both in the fitness industry, and we have both decided to go down the Health At Every Size, intuitive eating route of things.

So, I'm so excited to have you on today Karen, thanks for being here.

**Karen Preene:** Thank you for having me, I'm very excited, too.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, so why don't you first just start by telling me kind of your journey from the person that you were when I first started following you many years ago to where you're at now where actually becoming a fitness professional and specifically a HAES, anti-diet one.

**Karen:** Okay. So, fitness has always been part of my life in a way, because my dad was very much into exercise and he introduced me to weights. I think I was around 18, and that's quite different, unusual for a girl isn't it, to start lifting weights at 18 [laughs]. So it's always been a part of my life, and then from then it was swimming. But as I entered adulthood, of course that came along then with fitness, I knew it then as a way to lose weight, or a way to maintain thinness.

So my journey with becoming a fitness instructor began as a very diet culture based fitspo. I did qualifications to become a fitness instructor because I'd been offered an opportunity to help out in a local park and deliver fitness classes outside, which was really exciting. I enjoyed that so much I decided to qualify as a personal trainer.

Alongside this, I was working in an office part-time, bringing up two children. So I kind of felt like the fitness could be a second income, so to speak, but then the more I got involved with it, the more I wanted a career change, which tied in with becoming a personal trainer. So, I qualified as

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a personal trainer. I'd been a fitness instructor by this time for almost two years.

I devolved from park fitness to helping out in my local kickboxing gym and delivering women's fitness classes, which I absolutely loved. Became a personal trainer and I took on two clients in a gym where I was training, but it was very diet culture-based. And there was definitely a pressure to look a certain way as a personal trainer, and also there was an expectation of weighing clients, doing before and after pictures, taking measurements.

Now, I'd already started on my path of body positivity. So in about 2016 I discovered body positivity, but I discovered the kind of whitewashed version, the watered down version of it. But it did provide a gateway, I must say, into looking beyond weight loss and beyond appearance.

So, although I'd gone through my personal training qualification with this diet culture aspect, I was also beginning to learn about body positivity. So when I finally qualified, those traditional diet culture ways to go about fitness was no longer feeling aligned to what I was beginning to believe in. So, after two clients I decided oh, this is not the way that I want to go. That there must be more to fitness than weighing clients and expecting weight loss.

Because even the two clients that I'd taken on, their main goal was to get stronger, it wasn't to lose weight. So I went to university [laughs]. I decided, to be honest with you, my mental health had affected my job, so I was off sick for quite a long time with my job, which was office-based. So I'd made a decision to leave a job that I'd been in for 15 years and go to university full time to pursue a degree in exercise and health, because I didn't know how to operate as a personal trainer within the mainstream fitness industry.

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Although it was a dream that I wanted to be a personal trainer, I didn't feel like there was a way forward for me. So it just felt like getting further education would help me, I suppose, find another career path and that was where I discovered HAES, believe it or not, at university.

**Shohreh:** Wow, really?

**Karen:** Yeah. So, started having to study, to do case studies as part of our assignments and I was going through the research and realizing for myself that the weight loss research was very biased. Even when I started to read the studies and the outcomes, I was beginning to see quite a theme, that the weight loss was mostly insignificant, but yet it was still recorded as successful, even though it was a very tiny amount of people who would lose weight.

And then I realised even further that the longer the follow-up period after weight loss, the less successful the maintenance of weight loss is. So this started to set alarm bells off for me because I'm like, well, the evidence is contradictory to everything that I learned on my personal training course. And it was throughout one of the articles actually that I'd discovered Health At Every Size approach as an alternative to traditional weight loss.

I can't exactly remember what paper it was. It got me curious and so I started researching more about Health At Every Size. And I realized that there was a way for me to carry on as a personal trainer, but outside of the traditional diet culture based fitness industry that we know of. And that's how I ended up where I am today.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, I think so many of us come to that point and have to make a decision. I know it was the exact same for me. Like I said, when you and I first met online, I was definitely doing your more typical fitness professional stuff. I was in a business mastermind with like a really big fit pro in the industry who does weight loss, does fat loss, all that kind of stuff.

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And I felt very conflicted the entire time that I was in that mastermind because I wasn't doing what everyone else was doing and I felt very much out of alignment. And this person didn't know how to help me sell what I wanted to sell because I didn't want to sell body change [laughs]. It's just not what I wanted to do.

And I've mentioned this before on the podcast, but Christy Harrison's podcast, Food Psych, was really what helped me to realize that there was another way. That I could go in a different direction and that it could potentially be successful still, because obviously there's that fear that like, okay, even if there is another way to do this, will I be able to make any money. And of course I'm going to go out and say it's absolutely harder. It is much easier to find widespread success, especially online in the fitness industry, if you are selling weight loss and you're posting a lot of butt selfies, etc.

But, that doesn't mean that there isn't space for the rest of us who aren't doing that. And that doesn't mean that there aren't tons of people out there looking for what we have to offer.

**Karen:**

Well, I think that was my mindset when I decided to study at university. I remember thinking, I'm not going to conform to this, like the idea of me having to look a certain way, to be a personal trainer. The idea that I would have to weigh clients and mark weight loss as a progression. Already in my head I was thinking, I cannot do this and I'm not going to conform to it. I would rather not do it at all.

So, to happen upon HAES was almost like, I don't know how to explain it. But you know, you feel like everything's just fell into alignment. It's like, oh my goodness, I can actually move forward and the career path that I originally wanted to, but in a way that feels really good, and that it's in alignment with my beliefs, and it's not unethical [laughs].

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**Shohreh:** Yes, and I want to go back to what you said too about how body positivity was a gateway for you. Dr Kate Brown actually talked about that a bit in Episode 9, if you guys haven't listened to that episode, I recommend that you do because we were discussing, is body positivity useful anymore? Given that it's been so watered down. And her thought was that yes, because it brings so many people into that middle ground space where they can learn that it's possible to love or like or appreciate a body that isn't the mainstream.

And then from there it allows people, not everybody, but many people can find Health At Every Size, can find intuitive eating, can find body liberation and fat positivity, which are the more social justice oriented aspects of it. That body positivity was originally rooted in, and again, like you said, it's been whitewashed and it's been watered down, but it gives people a stepping stone to get there. And so I agree, it definitely has value.

And so I love hearing your story about that's exactly what happened for you. It was the starting point and then eventually you were able to go further.

**Karen:** It's unfortunate that body positivity has been coopted by brands and people intent on making money, and people who still sell weight loss. I think for the normal, regular person, it's certainly such a helpful gateway. But I feel like I was complicit in causing harm. Even though I can acknowledge that it was a gateway, I also have to acknowledge that I possibly caused harm whilst I was learning about body positivity.

And I just think it's important for us to be able to do that, and to remain open to learning more from the people who founded the movement, I suppose. What actually caused me to learn more about this was, I did a challenge online with Layla Saad. Have you heard of the Me and White Supremacy challenge?

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**Shohreh:** Yes, I have, I wasn't in the original challenge, but I've done the workbook since.

**Karen:** Well, that was what actually prompted me to start looking at how I was taking up space within places like body positivity and fat acceptance. So, I do feel like that has helped me immensely in my journey away from body positivity and into HAES as well, I must say. And it's helped me with unpacking all of it and seeing how it's all connected. The white supremacy, fatphobia, diet culture, and I do think that's obviously the area where mainstream body positivity, as it's been watered down, it lacks that layer of education, I believe.

**Shohreh:** It absolutely does lack that layer of education, and you're right. I think it's important to acknowledge that not only have we all caused harm in the past, because until we know, right, we're causing harm, until we know that's what we're doing and can improve on it. But then also, we're all causing harm in little ways right now as well. I think that's an important thing that we all have to recognize, is that our journey is to continue to cause the least amount of harm as possible.

And as we learn more information, we can do better, and we can cause less harm, but by virtue of having whatever privileges a person might have, and everybody has some kind of privilege. Even the most multiply marginalized individual is privileged in some way. When you have privilege, you don't see things as you would if you are a marginalized individual.

And so that's why we have to listen to, and learn from people who are living those experiences. Whether that's people who are in fat bodies, or it's people who are persons of color, or black and indigenous people, disability, whatever it may be, you know, I think that's one of the biggest things that I've learned in the past few years in getting into this space, is that there is a time to speak, and there's absolutely a time to listen and

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learn, and bring other people's voices to the forefront, because that's not our space to be speaking in.

And you're exactly right, that mainstream body positivity pretty much misses the mark on all of that [laughs].

**Karen:** I also think the mainstream like diet and fitness industry, it doesn't allow for the empathy for other people and their circumstances. It's very much their way or no way. Whereas I think HAES, well, I know HAES, it allows for each person's individual circumstances. And I think it makes for more empathetic fitness professionals.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely it does, I agree with you there. I think that that's one of the biggest differences that I've seen, and I've had this conversation with a lot of people here on the podcast too, about how it's so important to learn about individuals' backgrounds, their experiences. How different marginalizations have affected them. Because they're going to bring a totally different perspective and different needs to whatever it is that you're trying to work on with them.

Like it's not, everyone doesn't have the same relationship with food and exercise. It's colored by all of their different life experiences, and the mainstream fitness culture pretty much ignores that and says, "Everybody should be able to get thin and have six-pack abs, and eat this certain way." Yeah, it's just a very privileged way of looking at fitness and nutrition, and suggesting that everyone should be able to do it this one way. And of course, the one way changes all the time, depending on what's popular at the moment. But yeah, it's terrible [laughs].

**Karen:** I also had my own experience as well with the side effect, I suppose, of that way of thinking. Because I was very much myself, no days off, I think I used to train about six times a week. My rest days were 'active recovery,' and then I had a lot of stress. A lot of things happened in my

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life at once, and all of a sudden I couldn't dedicate as much time to the gym.

And I basically got pushed out of the gym that I was part of, the gym that I was instructing at. I was accused of being a slacker, no longer being a team player. And I think that was when the penny began to drop for me. Like I'd given so much of myself and then because of circumstances outside of my control, there was no empathy. There was no understanding; it was just a bit of like, if you can't do what we want you to do, so you're not needed anymore. I was like oh, okay [laughs].

**Shohreh:** That is absolutely terrible!

**Karen:** I know, but it was a big wakeup call and to be honest, in a way, I'm kind of glad that it happened because I needed a bump down from my privilege that I was one of those that believed, I didn't believe in no excuses, completely. I think I used to be like, well, if I can do it, you can, do you know what I mean? I was very privileged.

**Shohreh:** Yes, and there's so much of that on Instagram.

**Karen:** Unfortunately it took me having to experience it for myself, for the penny to begin to drop. There's more to life than fitness [laughs].

**Shohreh:** Absolutely, and I think as fitness professionals, people don't understand just how much pressure we are under as well. And I think that's one of the things that makes it very difficult for people to embrace things like HAES, and fat positivity, and body liberation, because there's still this mentality in our industry that one, that our body is our business card and that we need to look the part.

But also, that we're supposed to be in peak physical condition. Peak mental health, that we're supposed to be the example in what we eat and how often we exercise. And that is so much additional stress to put on yourself as a professional. Is that you have to be this way. And I know

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that's something we've both struggled with because we both have our own mental health issues, to feel like, are we not supposed to be in this industry, because we're not at this peak supposed health? I'm just going to say that nobody is, it's just they're hiding it.

**Karen:**

Yeah. When I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety over 10 years ago, I've been on and off medication throughout the years. So it's really impacted my life. And what I discovered when I started unpacking all of my own diet culture, my own fatphobia, was how much my disordered behaviors back then were negatively impacting my mental health as well.

To make a connection of those things, it's helped me immensely with my own journey, with my own mental health. And my body has changed as well. It's been such an enlightening journey for me, myself. So, to be able to help people go through that journey as well, but also like you say, it's about humanizing our experience as personal trainers. And there's some days when I really struggle to have the energy to work out myself.

And I think that's okay. I think the problem is people see it as our job, like you say; to be the most fittest and unfortunately that just is not always realistic. Because for me to be my most fittest, or my thinnest, I would have to engage in disordered behaviors. So that was one part of unpacking that I had to do. I had to let go of the belief that I needed to maintain a certain look. That was kind of preventing me from healing completely.

So I had to surrender to just letting my body do what it wanted to do, whilst I was learning about intuitive eating and Health At Every Size. And that's been really good for me, to be fair. It's been a really hard journey, but it's also been extremely liberating too.

**Shohreh:**

I'm so glad. I think there's also this myth in fitness, like I've definitely had people say to me, "Oh, you work out for a living," and I'm like, I don't work out for a living. I help other people [laughs] work out for a living. So, I

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have a full-time job running an in-person and online coaching business, and on top of that, somehow, I am expected to cook myself all the most healthy magical nutritious foods, and like you said, work out six days a week and then do active recovery on the seventh day, all of this stuff.

That's like a second job on top of the job that I already have. Certainly I know that over the last few years, my own fitness levels have dropped down significantly. Like I think some people might be shocked to know how little I exercise, particularly last year. And that's something that has not made me feel great, and so one of my goals in 2020 is to get back into a regular exercise routine and work a little bit less.

Because certainly I've been over-working, but that's part of life, you know? I always tell my clients, sometimes we have years where we just don't have the time or the energy to exercise that much. And that's okay. And then we have other years where we have lots more time. We can get tons of exercise in. We have the energy for it, and it fluctuates, just like our relationship with food fluctuates. Our relationship with exercise is going to fluctuate too.

We can't expect that just because one year you could strength train four days a week and go to yoga two days a week and whatever, that you're going to be able to keep up that pace forever. That's just unrealistic.

**Karen:** Exactly!

**Shohreh:** Both for personal trainers and for our clients.

**Karen:** Well, I actually took an intentional break from exercise because I did not know who I was without it. I think it had become such a part of my identity, because I'd ventured into competitive powerlifting. For me, I needed the break away completely, so that I could explore and redefine what movement meant to me. And it was within that time that I discovered

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that I loved walking [laughs]. And I was always told previously that walking wasn't enough.

And now we know that not to be true. I know that not to be true. So I found a love for walking, and I discovered yoga. I don't particularly engage with yoga now, but I needed it at the time, I think. Something just gentle, something that made me feel embodied within myself. And something that I could do on my own terms, because to me yoga had always been another active recovery type of workout.

So, for a whole year all I did was walking and yoga. It was such a needed break from the exercise that I had previously been engaging in. It was really scary at first to take that intentional break, but I actually think it was the best thing that I could have ever done. And now I'm able to go back to the gym, back to doing my weight training again. And it feels so different. I can literally go to the gym and decide what I want to do there and then, and what I enjoy rather than being caged in by a particular program. So yeah, it feels really freeing and really joyful for me right now.

**Shohreh:**

I want to just repeat what you said, which was that taking a break from the gym was probably the healthiest thing that you could have done in that moment. Because I know that is counterintuitive to what a lot of people think. And I have had people reach out to me before who wanted to work with me on exercise where literally my response to them was, "I actually think based on the information that you've told me, the best thing that you could do right now is to not exercise and take some time to heal your relationship with it, so that you can figure out what is a healthy exercise relationship for you."

Because the problem is that some people can figure it out just by experimentation, but if you have a horrible relationship with exercise, and you've had very bad experiences with it, like literal trauma with it, you may need to just cut it out of your life for a while, and figure out who you

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are without it, like you said, before you can come back to it. And I think we live in this culture that says that's the worst thing that you could do, and I think for a lot of people it's the best thing they could do.

**Karen:**

I agree and to be honest, most of the clients that I'm working with right now, because I'm a completely new business, so people are coming to me as-- they know I'm a HAES fitness professional. And all of my clients have actually had breaks from exercise, and they're now ready to engage in exercise again. So it's really interesting to share that common experience with quite a few people because like you say, we're told, do something, something is better than nothing.

And sometimes actually, like you say, we do need that break. Because what we're taught about, me and my clients, it's like that pendulum swing. So they've gone from having disordered relationship with exercise, not really knowing about exercise outside of attempts to lose weight or body modification, to doing nothing at all and then feeling not so good within their bodies by not doing anything, to wanting to come back to it, but with a completely new perspective. That's where we are and it feels so good to be able to help people discover exercise that feels good for them.

To hear some of their past experiences where they've been made to do exercises that they really don't like, purely because their personal trainer would suggest that it's the best way for them to get their results, which we know often translates as weight loss. So, I ask them, and we talk about the exercises that they don't want to do, and I think it's really affirming for them to know that they've got a trainer that's not going to make them to do any... Look, I'm not going to make them do anything they don't want to do, or anything that they won't enjoy.

**Shohreh:**

What you talked about with the pendulum swing really mirrors what Jes Baker talks about with food, this idea that you go from dietland to donutland, to eventually intuitive eating. And I've seen this with so many

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of my clients, and I see it with exercise too. And it is such a beautiful thing that we offer people where we don't force them to do exercise that they hate. We don't tell them that they have to do a certain amount of it for it to count. That they have to sweat or feel a certain level of soreness.

It's one of my favorite parts about the work that I get to do as a HAES professional, is to dispel so many of the myths that people believe about what makes exercise valuable. And I'm sure that you've been loving that as well, now that you have some clients under your belt.

**Karen:** Yeah, it's amazing and like I tell them all the time, to me it's a collaboration. It's not me telling you what you need to do. It's about us working together to find out what works best for you. Because obviously some people having health conditions, or they cannot engage in exercise in the way that they used to, so they've had to go from exercise that they really loved, but that they can't do anymore. It just feels really nourishing, if that makes sense?

It feels really wholesome and really nourishing and really affirming to my clients' experiences.

**Shohreh:** And any time we're talking exercise, I also think it's so important to mention how diet culture has made exercise and activity about morals -

**Karen:** Oh yes.

**Shohreh:** And it's not. So we could talk for hours about how exercise is good for us and name all the reasons why, and how it'll make you feel and blah-blah-blah. I mean we work in fitness, like we clearly love helping people to bring exercise into their lives in a healthy way. And exercising is not morally superior to other activities, and it's none of our business if people choose not to exercise at all. And there are perfectly valid reasons why individuals wouldn't exercise for a time period, or for their life, or whatever.

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If you have other shit that you want to do, and prioritizing exercise isn't important to you, that's fine. It's like anything else in life that is healthy or good for us. Not everybody does all the healthy and good things, right? Maybe something else makes more sense for us to do, or we like it better, or it's easier, whatever reason that there may be. But for some reason in our culture we treat exercise as just like, if you don't do it you're a horrible person. You don't care about your health; you don't care about your family, blah-blah-blah.

And I'm like look; everybody knows how good exercise is for them. That doesn't mean that you can't make a choice not to do it. Like everybody knows how great brushing your teeth is for you. Some people still don't freaking brush their teeth! You get to decide, it's your life and your body.  
[Laughs]

**Karen:**

I have two teenagers and trying to get them to brush their teeth at least twice a day is [laughs] impossible! I definitely agree with that. Especially with my, to me my depression is a chronic illness, because it's not going to go away. I've had it for over 10 years now, and there are some days where it takes all of my energy just to get out of bed and make sure that my kids are off to school and they have clean clothes. And so the basic things, I have to put my energy into that, and exercise just doesn't come into it on those days.

And I no longer feel bad about that. I used to, but because of this journey and because of me taking the time off, and unpacking it all, I understand now, I don't associate any more value to if I move or if I don't. Sometimes it's necessary for me that I don't actually waste that energy in a way, because it takes so much of my energy just to get through a day. So yeah, it's definitely been a journey of liberation in a way, I must admit, for myself as well.

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**Shohreh:** It always makes me laugh how exercise is one of those things that *can* really help depression and anxiety, and people like to say that, but also you forget that depression and anxiety make it very difficult to exercise. So, there's inherent tension between those two facts because it's just more challenging. I mean I'm someone who also has ADHD, I've struggled with depression and anxiety at different points in my life and it just makes it much harder to exercise.

It's like yay, it's great, this is going to help me, but just because it's going to help me, doesn't mean you can get yourself to do it. And so again, this kind of goes back to that no excuses mentality that is just useless and ignores people's lived experiences.

**Karen:** I agree, which is another reason why I love walking now because what I do is when I'm having those days, and I do know that movement will help me. It does help give me a little boost of energy. So if I have a day where I really can't move, then I don't, and I don't feel bad for it. But if I have a day where I can potentially get myself out of the house, I will just walk to the local shop and back, and it takes me about half an hour, and that's enough.

And I feel like that's enough, do you know? Whereas before that wouldn't have even crossed my mind that walking to the shop and back would be a legitimate form of exercise. Whereas now, it's probably one of my main forms of movement.

**Shohreh:** I have two dogs, and so walking is just part of having them. And I'm so glad because like you said, sometimes you just can't get yourself to do anything else, but walking is so valuable and it feels so wonderful. And so I'm really glad that on days where I like don't want to leave the house, I know that for their health and wellbeing, I need to at least take them for a walk, even if it's a short one. And I always feel a lot better when I do. So

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it's nice to have that kind of little push to do it when it would otherwise be really difficult.

So we're doing this interview in January, and this episode is going to come out in January, and this time of year most of what gyms and many fitness professionals are pedaling is, I would say predatory in nature [laughs]. And leads to, frankly, a worse relationship with exercise for most people, and getting stuck in that same off and on cycle of exercising where people go all gung-ho at the beginning of the year, and then they drop off fairly quickly, and aren't able to have any consistency.

So I want to talk about with you, what you think having a good relationship with exercise is, and how people can work to achieve that.

**Karen:**

I think it's about moving in ways that feel good in the moment and afterwards. Probably move in ways that you don't feel forced to, and moving just because you want to, or because you love that form of movement in particular, and not because it's associated to any particular outcome. I think it's just about reclaiming exercise for yourself. Going back to play, even playful movement, when you think about how you moved as a child.

I think that was one thing that helped me with my walking. I did a lot of walking when I was a young child with my nan. She'd take a lot of me and my cousins out for walks, and my brother and sister; we'd do that a lot on Sundays. And I remember it being such a lovely part of my childhood. So that was a good exercise to do.

I thought back about what movement meant to me when I was younger, I loved playing rounders at school, absolutely loved that. Playing netball. And I realized how much I used to love movement, and it had, at that time when I was young and had not discovered diet culture, it had nothing to do with moving my body or for burning calories, or for weight loss.

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It was literally just a joyful movement. I associated it back to being a child, I think. That was one way that I was able to relook at what exercise meant to me. Look, I used to love movement when I was young. We did roller-skating, we used to ride our bikes, we were on skateboards, we were always outside, and we were always playing, and it never felt like a punishment [laughs]. It never felt like something I was made to do.

It never felt like something I was forced to do. It was literally a joyful way to move my body. That really helped me with redefining movement as an adult, like beyond the diet culture, beyond mainstream fitness. So, swimming, swimming is another big one that I love as well. Although I can't access it as often as I would like to, it's another form of movement that I wouldn't have considered as part of my normal workout routine, but now it's something that is part of my joyful movement.

I think joyful movement can be anything. Weightlifting for me is another one of my joyful movements. Some people, they may hate that [laughs], but I love it. There's nothing better than deadlifting, that's my most favorite thing in the whole world. If I could only deadlift forever, I'd be quite happy with that. [Laughter]

**Shohreh:** So the Instagram handle is fitting.

**Karen:** It is [laughs]. And I do think that joyful movement can still be what we may consider hard. I love high intensity training, when my energy is quite high. I can't explain it, it's quite exhilarating. I do still love hard exercise, if that makes sense? But I know now when I'm in the mood for it, and I know now when not to force it.

So, it just feels very, oh, I feel like I have a choice all the time, constantly. I get to decide what exercise means to me, and I get to choose the ways to move at any time. I'm not limited.

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**Shohreh:**

I love that about choice because that is such an important piece of it. So often as adults we feel like we are forced to do certain kinds of exercise. It's the battle of the shoulds, we're like, oh, I should do this thing, I should exercise for this length of time. And I think what you said about how joyful movement can be anything is really important, because I love the term 'joyful movement,' and I also think it is a bit of a misnomer because people hear it and they think that it has to mean like only gentle exercise.

So it can only mean walking or yoga, and what I always tell my clients is the difference between joyful movement and other exercise is really the intention behind it. As you said, if you're working out solely for the purpose to change your body, or because you feel like you have to burn off the food that you ate, or it's something that again that you 'should do,' that's not joyful movement because you're not deriving enjoyment out of that.

It's really more about the outcome for you than it is about the process, but I feel like joyful movement is much more about the actual process of doing the exercise, and then how you feel afterwards. It's not about making it all feel really crappy. It's not about, I'm going to force myself to do this thing because I need to beat my body into submission. It's about how does my body want to move today, and what would feel great to me in this moment?

Like you said, sometimes that is deadlifting huge amounts of weight and sometimes it's not. Sometimes it is doing like a yoga flow or it's walking. For me it's a lot of doing aerials, so I spend a lot of time on the trapeze, which some people may not think of as exercise, but like it's me moving my body and it feels amazing.

**Karen:**

I love how you said that in such a way and I babbled on [laughs]. I think joyful movement, like you say, is about choice and the intention behind that choice. I think that's an amazing way to look at it. I used to have a

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program and it was very, I didn't go off the program. I'd make up for days if I missed them, whereas now I have no program. One day I might decide to go and deadlift, the next day I am doing a HIIT in my kitchen, on my exercise bike. Then I might have a walk to the shop, then I'm doing a yoga flow.

I've no particular program. I literally just go with what I feel like on the day, which is amazing [laughs].

**Shohreh:**

And it's very different from, you and I both have a weightlifting past where everything has to be on a program and periodized and you do a very specific amount of sets and reps. And it's interesting, I'm sure you've experienced this too, but it's completely changed how I work with clients as well because that has changed for me. Like I'm so much less about like, let's get you an exact program and you have to do this and this.

Some clients want that and I'm happy to give them that, but I have a lot of clients who are just trying to find a way to have a better relationship with exercise, and moving consistently in their life. And so it's become much more about me kind of coaching their mindset around it and their relationship with it, and like a little bit of programming, and less about, here's the program and I've spent hours perfecting it for you, and you need to follow it exactly.

**Karen:**

It's so different and like with my clients, we have programs, but it's all based around their preferences, and there's always the option for them to come back. I want it to be a program in progress where we can change things. If something is not working, if something doesn't feel good, if there's something they want to add, like it's an ongoing, living document, I suppose, that we update as we go along.

Because I think that's the thing when we're exploring. We don't know what's going to feel good. We don't know what's going to work. So we have a starting point and then we can build on it from that. And like you

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say, a lot of clients still want that program. They want to be able to exercise without thinking about it, without putting too much thought into the process. They just want something that they can follow, and I think that's absolutely still valid.

But also it allows room for exploration if we allow our programs to be flexible. So, that's the approach that I'm taking.

**Shohreh:** Yes, and I think that's another great word for joyful movement, like another describing word would be 'flexibility,' because so much of exercise culture is very rigid. And there's a lot of rules that you're supposed to be following, and I think I want to go back to what you said too about getting in touch with your inner child, and what you enjoyed about movement. Because for a lot of people that's where I help them start in improving their relationship with exercise, is if they feel like nothing feels joyful to them, then we go back to what was joyful as a child.

Like in what ways did you like to play? I had a client in one of my challenges, I do a Season of Self-Care challenge in December every year, who told me that she went to a playground and she just played around with her partner, and had a grand old time. It totally brought her back to when she was a kid. And that's just not something we do that often as adults, you know.

We walk by the playground, we don't think like, hey, I want to go play on the playground, but I spent hours doing that as a kid, and I loved it.

**Karen:** If you could see my face right now, I'm smiling so big as soon as you said that because that automatically threw up memories, you know, of being on the playground as a child with my friends, and learning new things. And like you say, it's just not something that we consider doing as adults.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, when I was a kid we used to have monkey bar battles on the playground [laughs]. So we had this really long monkey bar set at my

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elementary school playground, with like a ladder on either side. And so one person would climb up on each side and you'd say, "One, two, three go," and you'd race to get to the middle the fastest. And I just want to say that as an adult, and I'm someone who does pull-ups, like monkey bars are really hard [laughter].

Like when you are not a tiny, little child anymore, it is really hard to hold your body weight up and swing on monkey bars, but it is still super fun to try [laughter].

**Karen:** I'll tell you a new one that I want to try as an adult. I used to be able to hula hoop, like I could probably hula hoop for an hour, as a child, just non-stop. And I cannot do it as an adult! [Laughter]

**Shohreh:** I have never been able to hula hoop my entire life! [Laughter]

**Karen:** So that's a new challenge for me actually. I'm glad that I've remembered it. I was going to get myself a hula hoop and see if I can learn how to do it.

**Shohreh:** That sounds amazing! I have so many people be like, I'll teach you, you can learn. I'm like, you don't understand, I've tried this like 20, 30 times and no one has been able to unlock the secret. I have awkward hips, I don't know, it's weird [laughs].

**Karen:** Well, I used to be able to do it as a child, so now I'm like, why can't I do it now, what's going on? So I want to, I need to figure this out [laughs].

**Shohreh:** Did you have a Skip-It in the UK, that little skipping toy that you would put around your ankle and then it would go around you and you would skip over it?

**Karen:** Yes, we did.

**Shohreh:** That was like my version of hula hoppin, I loved that thing as a kid!

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**Karen:** Do you know what? I think we had one that used to count the repetitions [laughs].

**Shohreh:** Oh yeah, it would count because you wanted to like keep pushing it to see how many you could get!

**Karen:** Yeah, like a competition yeah.

**Shohreh:** Yeah but it was like a fun competition you know, not like as an adult it would be like, I got to get more every time, but it was so fun as a kid [laughter], you would just be like, I want to beat my record [laughter].

Well, if you're listening, clearly you can see how much joy and delight we get just from talking about the things that we did as a kid. So, my challenge for you listeners is to think about some things that brought you a lot of joy as a child and see if you can go do that.

Maybe if you have your own kids, you want to go do it with them, or if you have a partner, or a friend, like hit up the playground, go play four square, whatever it is, and just try and tap back into that. Like you said, before we were inundated with diet culture, before people told us that our bodies were wrong and it was just fun to move them, like that's what we want to get back to with joyful movement.

**Karen:** And choice, giving ourselves choice. I think that's a really good way to frame things.

**Shohreh:** Well then, we have come to our final question and I know that you know what it is, but just to remind everybody else. Tell me, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

**Karen:** I think I would elaborate again on choice. Making choices to me in the moment, dependent on how I feel on any given day, and not feeling bad about that choice. I give myself freedom to make choices dependent on how I feel on any given day.

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**Shohreh:** I love that! I don't think anyone has described it in quite that way before, but I do think that's the underlying message of so much of this podcast, is that you get to define things for yourself. It's your choice, like whatever health and wellness are going to mean to you, it's up to you. And that goes directly against mainstream diet and wellness culture.

**Karen:** To elaborate on that. I'm actually a parent, I'm a single parent, and I'd probably describe myself as a parent in poverty. Part of me making choices daily is dependent on my access because what I've discovered outside of diet culture is that I can't always access the things that diet culture deems to be healthy. You know, the moralization of food, it's taken me a long time to work my way through that and not feel bad about the choices that I'm making.

Because those choices do very much depend on the things available to me, because of my own circumstances. So I think that's where I'm getting at, that my wellness is defined by the choices that I make, that are dependent on my access, and I no longer feel bad about those choices if they're not in line with everything that I learned before.

**Shohreh:** I think that's so important and ties in with everything we've been talking about, about how our own circumstances really create our ability to define health and wellness for ourselves in our lives. Because what is healthy to one person who has unlimited expendable income is going to be very different for somebody who, like you said, is a single parent raising kids on a budget. Like what you have access to is just different, and so you're not going to be able to define health for yourself in the same way.

**Karen:** No, so there's freedom of choice basically, without moralization, is what allows me to make choices that enhance my wellbeing, yeah.

**Shohreh:** And I think that's something that everybody should pledge to do better of in 2020, is to not judge other people's choices. In general, but in particular, when it comes to health and wellness, because we just don't

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know what's going on in that person's life, what they have access to, what the state of their physical and mental health is. And it's none of our business, right? Other people are going to make the choices they need to make for themselves and if they didn't ask you for help or advice, then you should just keep your mouth shut!

**Karen:** Yes. [Laughter]

**Shohreh:** Well, thank you so much for being here Karen. How can people find you and work with you if they'd like to?

**Karen:** Okay, so I'm Deadlift and Red Lips on all socials. I do work as an online coach at the moment, although because of a podcast of yours that I listened to, I forgot which episode it was, but I think the lady's name was Christina, and she had said she doesn't take on new clients in January because of the diet culture and because people are more likely to make choices that are dictated by diet culture. So I took that approach as well, because it just felt so much in alignment with what I do.

So I'm not taking on any new clients now until after January. But yeah, I'm Deadlifts and Red Lips. I'm an online personal trainer and you can find me on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

**Shohreh:** I love that you decided to do that. For those who don't know, the episode she's referring to is episode number three with Christina Montalvo, and I will link that in the show notes as well as the other episodes that we've talked about throughout this one.

Well, thanks again Karen and I hope that you have a wonderful rest of your day.

**Karen:** Thank you Shohreh, thank you for having me.

**Shohreh:** Of course. And that's our show for today. I appreciate you listening to and supporting the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. If you enjoyed this

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