

BREAK UP WITH

TOXIC FITNESS CULTURE IN 5 SIMPLE STEPS



1

Pay Attention

The first step is the hardest, and it's also the most important. Before you shift a mindset or change a pattern in your life, you have to recognize that it's there. The next time you are doom-scrolling social media, pause to reflect on how certain posts make you feel. Which images and messages feed your soul and which ones leave you feeling inadequate or maybe even envious? Who do you surround yourself with and how do those interactions (friends, family, influencers and your own inner critic) make you feel? Who builds you up and who breaks you down? Pay attention to the subtle and the salient alike. The seemingly little things add up.

Try This...

Spend a few minutes looking at today's social media feed, your email inbox, text messages and phone calls (if you're old school). Do this exercise observing without personal judgment of how you 'should' or 'should not' feel.

Which ones make you feel energized?

Are there any that evoke negative emotions; stress, fear, anxiety, envy? Which ones are they?

2

Declutter

To adopt a healthier relationship with both your mind and your body, you need to make space. Does your social media feed look like fitness porn? Is your inbox full of “get skinny quick” messages? Are the people and promotions surrounding you perpetuating beliefs that are wreaking havoc on your well-being?

If a diet, a gimmick or gizmo sounds too good to be true, it definitely is. Unfortunately there aren't any magic pills you can swallow or 3-minute workouts that will transform your life while simultaneously whittle your waistline. But that doesn't stop a multi-billion dollar industry from trying to sell you that. The diet and exercise industries prey on your deepest insecurities and make money by convincing you that your pant size directly correlates to your happiness and success. That's what keeps them in business and provides a new “next best thing” every time you open your inbox. Not only are you being sold snake oil, but you are being told that there's something wrong with you that the snake oil will fix. Whether you realize it or not, all those inputs become a part of your belief system and impact you on a deep, emotional level.

- 👉 There's nothing wrong with you!
- 👉 It's time to get rid of the toxic messages that make you feel bad about yourself.
- 👉 Unsubscribe and unfollow anything that doesn't serve you. Do a little Marie Kondo-style decluttering of the toxic messages (and people) in your world and make space for yourself and your health.

Try This...

Unfollow

Get familiar with the unfollow and unsubscribe buttons today. It's time to break up with the influences and influencers that are putting you down. Not ready for a total break-up? It's ok to start with a 30-day snooze.

3 Change Your Chatter

Now that you've cleaned up the messages infiltrating your external inbox, it's time to change your internal chatter. Your voice is the one you hear most frequently. **What you say and how you say it matters.** Would you talk to someone else the way you talk to yourself? If the answer is "no", it's time to reframe the narrative and convert your inner critic into an inner champion. Warning: old habits die hard. Try it and be patient with yourself. This is a process and you will falter. Dust yourself off, and keep trying. What's the worst that will happen? No one can hear the inner voice anyway. ;)

Try This...

Think about a situation in your life right now or recently where your Inner Critic voice is activated. What does the inner critic say? Write it down.

← *In the space to the left, draw a picture of the character of who your inner critic is and give them a name.*

Think about what a good friend or mentor would say to you about that same situation. Write down those phrases. That is the voice of your inner mentor.

POSITIVE READS WE RECOMMEND:

Playing Big - Tara Mohr

Chatter - Ethan Cross

The Joy of Movement:
How exercise helps us
find happiness, hope,
connection, and
courage
- Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D

It Doesn't Have to Hurt
to Work - Erin Paruszewski

Both your inner critic and inner mentor are important voices, but it's critical to understand that you have both voices and that **you have the ability to recognize when they are out of balance and rebalance them.**

4

Let The Good Stuff In

Seek out the people, brands, services and messages that are swimming upstream in the health and wellness industry, and doing so in an authentic way. Much of the messaging out there would lead you to believe that we are all supposed to look like Barbie and Ken dolls. It just isn't true.

👉 Say no to the typical "harder + faster = better" messaging around fitness.

👉 Say no to another magical DIET that is masquerading as the secret solution for all of your sorrows.

Follow and support organizations who represent you and your values. Engage with individuals who inspire you to be the most authentic version of you, not the airbrushed, filtered phony one. Once you let go of the bullsh*t marketing that is manipulating your every move, you will free up your brain, your body and your energy to focus on your health and wellness goals without feeling bogged down by expectations. Shame spirals are real. Break the cycle and be you. Everyone else is taken.

Try This...

Identify 3 people in your life who build you up. Reach out to them this week and let them know that you appreciate them and why. Write their names below:

Identify 3 brands/people in your virtual world that are promoting messages that excite and empower you. Follow them, engage with them, share them. Write their names below:

5 Be An Upstander

BE THE CHANGE
you wish to see in the world

-Mahatma Gandhi

Help shift the narrative. Toxic fitness culture has been around for ages. It won't change overnight but there is rising frustration surrounding the pressure and expectations to look and be a certain way. With a constant stream of social media, the "shoulds" are more in our face than ever, leading to increased rates of depression, anxiety and a whole host of other mental health challenges.

Shift your narrative first. **You must put on your oxygen mask before helping others.** Then set an example for others to follow. Stand up and speak out for a more accepting world that is truly invested in supporting all humankind of all shapes, sizes and abilities.

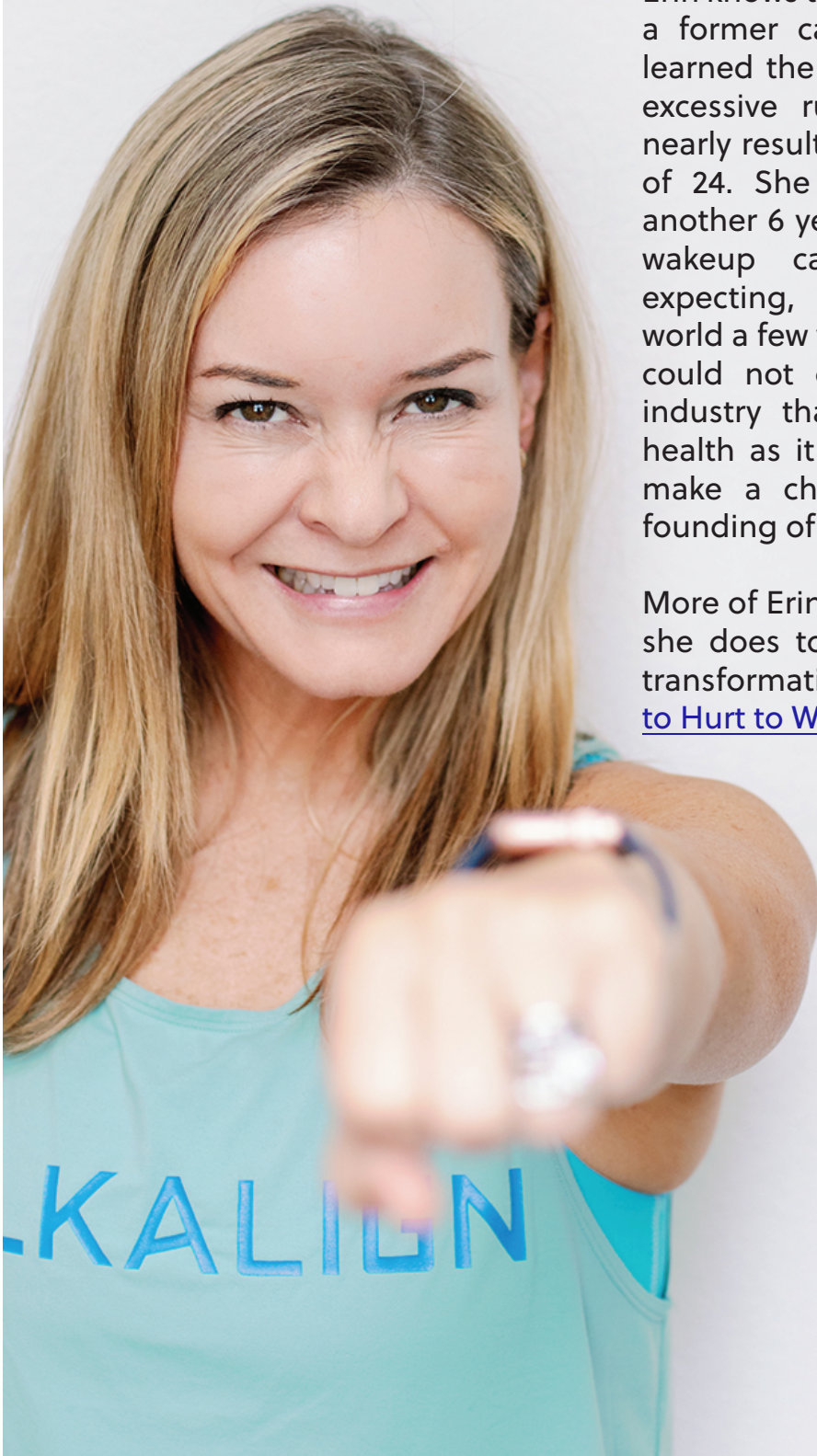
Set an example for your family, colleagues and friends. Support individuals and organizations that share a similar belief system with you. It is so much easier to nod in agreement or to passively let the same old messages and expectations infiltrate your inner being. Heck, calorie counting, fat shaming, and self-deprecating self-talk in the presence of others have been ways to bond with others for centuries. It is more pronounced with certain genders and cultures, but once it starts, it's a hard habit to break.

Inertia is real. It is so much harder to actively try to stop and/or change a narrative than it is to accept it. Yes, it may require some difficult conversations with those who are deeply entrenched in toxic fitness culture. You will encounter people or organizations who are content with the status quo. They may even use it to their advantage. You can't worry about them. **Stay true to yourself and what sparks joy for you.** Your light will shine through and inspire others, even when you're not aware of it.

Start now by sharing this with someone in your world who needs it.




ALKALIGN




[Erin Paruszewski](#) is the founder and CEO of Alkalign Studios, a health and wellness company that is focused on alignment-based functional fitness training. In addition to promoting strength, mobility and balance in your body, Alkalign's mission is to keep you safe, both physically and emotionally.

Erin knows toxic fitness culture first-hand. She is a former calorie-counting cardio junkie who learned the hard way that burnout is real. Her excessive running and inadequate nutrition nearly resulted in a hip replacement at the age of 24. She stubbornly continued to run for another 6 years. Although this wasn't quite the wakeup call her physical therapist was expecting, bringing two daughters into the world a few years later finally was. Erin knew she could not continue to live and work in an industry that was as toxic for psychological health as it is for physical health. She had to make a change. And that change was the founding of Alkalign in 2015.

More of Erin's story and inspiration for the work she does today can be found in her book, a transformational memoir called [It Doesn't Have to Hurt to Work](#).

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