

# Mindful Tips for *Pain-Free* Daily Movement

Sitting - Standing - Lifting - Walking – Exercising



**the manual touch**  
PHYSICAL THERAPY

*Reclaim Movement, Function and Life*

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## About Denise Schwartz



### Specialties

- Whole Body Approach
- Functional Rehab
- Myofascial Release
- Integrative Manual therapy
- Cranial therapy
- Spinal conditions
- Kinesiotaping
- Running Injury Recovery/Prevention
- Balance/Vestibular rehab



The Manual Touch Physical Therapy opened in August of 2010, providing a whole body approach to health using both traditional and nontraditional PT practices. Denise Schwartz, Owner and Founder, fully believes this is the best approach to facilitating each patient's ability to overcome pain and achieve a higher quality of life.

Denise began her career working in a Level 1 trauma hospital for 14 years in the outpatient area, treating a variety of orthopedic and neurological patients. Having taken more than 5,000 continuing education hours to further her PT knowledge in manual therapy, spinal care, running and functional rehabilitation (rehab), Denise is certified and extensively trained in Integrative Manual Therapy (IMT).

Expanding her patient reach and impact, Denise then went on to

start CenterIMT Chicago. As part owner of three CenterIMT clinics, she organized numerous IMT courses and mentored other IMT therapists in the methods she has mastered to provide the best results for her patients.

Denise has assisted at many manual therapy classes and has taught myofascial release and therapeutic taping to other physical therapists at continuing education courses.

Denise began running later in life which quickly became a passion. Despite multiple injuries common in older runners, she has gone on to complete numerous half marathons and her first full marathon in 2015.



# What is Mindfulness?

Self-awareness of how to use our bodies safely is now known as Mindfulness. In other words, it is the state of being conscious or aware of body movement in the moment.

As a Physical Therapist, I teach 'body mechanics', or how to use the body efficiently to prevent injury. I practice these body mechanics myself in order to prevent injury and stay healthy.

For example, I am mindful of:

- Using proper posture while helping someone to stand from a chair, move in bed, or while bending down to work on someone's feet.
- Sitting properly while using my hands to work on patients without hurting my back.
- Keeping the joints of my fingers and wrists in the best alignment while working on patients, so as not to cause degeneration or injury.
- Standing and using my arms and body in a way that decreases possible injury as I'm lifting a body part (such as a leg) to assess for joint range of motion or knee ligament injury.
- Practicing self-awareness of my limitations when helping a patient and, if necessary, asking a colleague to help.

This mindfulness component of Physical Therapy will not only help me stay healthy as a practitioner, but it also provides the groundwork to teach these same mindful movement techniques to my patients.

In this eBook, I share some important tips on how you too can be mindful as you move through life, so you can protect your body and maintain your health.

PAIN

*It is an important  
guide.*

*If a position or activity  
causes pain, STOP!*

# Tip 1: Engaging your abs

How to be mindful of strengthening your core, the foundation of all movement

Engaging the lower abdominals helps support the back. Use these simple tricks to find muscles you didn't know you had:

- Place tongue on the back of top teeth and make the “thhh” sound. Hold for 5 seconds, then rest 5 seconds. Repeat this 10 times, twice per day (morning and night). You can also use this trick as you move throughout your day. [Click here to watch my “Engaging Abs” video demonstration on YouTube](#)
- Stand with your feet close together and rock forward onto the balls of your feet then back towards your heel. Make sure you are moving from the ankles and not the hips. Repeat this several times daily. [Click here to watch my “Center of Balance” video demonstration on YouTube](#)

# Tip 2: Sitting Safely

How to be mindful of sitting down and standing back up

We are a society that sits a lot whether on a couch, at the kitchen table, at a desk, in the car or on a toilet. Everybody has to be able to sit down and then stand back up again.

Here are some tips for sitting down:

- Keep knees straight ahead, pulling knees slightly out as if pushing against a wall.
- Hinge at your hips sticking your backside back towards chair.
- Reach back for the chair with your hands.
- Gently lower yourself into the chair.

[Click here to watch my video demonstration on YouTube](#)

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Standing back up from chair:

- Scoot to end of chair.
- Keep knees straight ahead and slightly pulled out.
- Push up with your hands or reach forward.
- Hinge at your hips while pushing down through your feet; your head will be way out ahead of your feet.
- Straighten your knees and hips to stand up.

## Tip 3: Good Posture

How to be mindful of ‘sitting up!’

Traditional advice from the time you were small rears its ugly head again. Whenever you’re in the seated position, try these tips to regain your posture and improve sitting comfort:

- Place your knees lower than your hips, a wedged pillow under can help.
- Use a lumbar support pad behind the small of your back to support the normal curvature of the spine and promote proper posture.
- Choose a firm chair over something mushy that will compromise the position of your back.
- Keep your feet flat on the floor; do not cross your legs.
- Sitting the majority of your day will set you up for a boatload of issues as [outlined in this great infographic](#).

## Tip 4: Sensible Shoes

Tips for proper footwear

The description alone raises images of shoes that might have been worn by your favorite older relative or clergy leader once upon a day, but many of today’s fashions make sensible far more fashionable while still keeping your posture “in line.” Save the flip flops for the sand and the high heels for a sit-down date with door-to-door valet service. Everything in between should have solid arch support and be secure on the foot.

# Tip 5: Standing Posture

## How to be mindful of your standing posture

We often have to stand in lines at the store, at a social event, at the train or bus stops, at the sink washing dishes, or – hopefully – at a standing desk. Maintaining good posture or alignment prevents you from irritating yourself. Here are some tips to ensure you're using good standing posture:

- Stand evenly over both feet, shoulder width apart, do not lean more on one hip.
- Relax shoulders by lowering your chest and do not over pull shoulder blades back.
- Engage your abs: [Click here to watch my “Engaging Abs” video demonstration on YouTube](#)
- Find your center of balance over your whole feet: [Click here to watch my “Center of Balance” video demonstration on YouTube](#)

# Tip 6: Bending

## How to be mindful of bending over

However low you bend....

- Avoid bending and turning at the waist.
- Hinge at the hips by sticking your backside back and then bend the knees.
- Or, skip bending all together and use a “grabber” to pick things up from the floor.

# Tip 7: Great Sleep

## How to maximize your Z's

Sleeping is a time for the body to rest, recover and heal. Use these positions for the biggest bang for your sleeping buck:

- Sleep on your back with one or more pillows under your thighs.
- Sleep on your side with a medium size pillow between your legs.
- When sleeping on your side, be sure to use a large enough pillow under your head to keep your head from bending to one side.
- Laying on one side may be better than the other.
- Mattresses should be firm with enough cushioning to support the natural curves of the body.
- Avoid tummy sleeping.
- When getting out of bed, roll onto your side, bring your legs over the side of the bed, push up to sitting using your arms.

# Tip 8: Going Up Stairs

## How to safely climb stairs

Here are helpful tips you can use on any kind of step or stair whether you have knee pain or not.

When going up stairs:

- Be sure to keep knees straight ahead – do not let knees point in – think about pointing knees out as if against a wall.
- Bend slightly at your hips.
- Push down through your heels as you step up – you should feel your glutes working.

An added benefit of climbing stairs this way – you are strengthening your glutes every time you climb stairs!



# Tip 9: Going Down Stairs

## How to safely descend stairs

Going down stairs can be more challenging when having active knee pain. If pain is severe, step down with painful knee, **1 step at a time**.

If able, to go down stairs step over step:

- Bend slightly at your hips.
- Be sure to keep knees straight ahead and pull out slightly as if pushing against a wall as you step down.

# Tip 10: Caring for Pets

## Tips for taking care of your furry friends

I know; we all love our pets and would do anything for them. However, we must always be mindful of where our pets are so as not to trip over them. In addition, the care of pets takes a lot of bending, squatting, lifting, holding onto, walking, etc. These activities come with the possibility of injury.

Be sure to always use good mechanics by [squatting correctly](#) when:

- Putting food in their bowls.
- Picking them up.
- Washing off their feet.
- Picking up their waste.

When walking your dog, evaluate different leash options to better handle your dog when your dog wants to take off after something. You must always be ready for this to happen, by keeping your core engaged, [as instructed in this video](#), throughout the walk.

# Tip 11: Walking

## Tips for mindful walking

What is mindful walking? Well, let's look at it in 2 ways:

- Being aware or mindful of what is going on around you for safety and to be present.
- What is going on with your body.

When walking on a trail through the woods or the paths at the Botanic Garden, it's easy to be mindful of what's going on around you. There is so much beauty to look at as you are walking through the forest or garden. So enjoyable!

- Flowers – notice their color, texture, and greenery.
- Trees – notice the shape, size and color of the trunk and bark.
- Leaves – notice the color, size, and shape.
- Smells – notice the smells of flowers, the forest floor, or animals.
- Sounds – notice animal sounds of birds, squirrels, and insects.

Being out in a world made of concrete, can be more challenging, as the beauty may not be there to focus on, but to be safe you need to be just as mindful when walking.

### **When walking, be mindful of your body:**

- Keep your eyes focused 5-10 feet in front of you so you can notice any changes in the terrain such as a sudden shift in the height of the sidewalk, a curb, or a tree branch.
- Keep your ears alert for sounds of vehicles, bicycles or other people coming up behind, in front of, or around you.
- Every few minutes check that your abs are engaged [as you learned in this video](#).
- Swing your arms from your shoulders not your elbows.
- Pretend you are walking on either side of a traffic line to keep your feet the right distance apart consistently.

# Tip 12: Exercise

## How to be mindful when exercising

Exercising regularly is important for many reasons. It improves musculoskeletal health, joint health, energy levels, and body system regulation, such as blood pressure, heart rate, insulin levels, and more.

The [CDC recommends](#) a combination of:

- Moderate aerobic activity, at least 2 and half hours, spread out throughout the week, such as brisk walking or swimming.
- Strength training for all major muscle groups at least 2-3 times per week.
- Vigorous aerobic activity, at least 1 hour 15 min, of faster paced activities, such as running, elliptical or fast swimming.

I would add another important category of exercise to your weekly regimen, **daily balance exercises**. So you can....

- Be mindful of where you are in space.
- Be solid on your feet.
- Prevent falls.

Balance exercises are important for EVERYONE, whether you are young, old, athletic, or only walk.

[Click here to download these balance exercises from my website](#). Remember, if you experience an increase in pain with any activity, STOP!

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## **Tips for warming up before strenuous exercise**

A gentle warm-up before any strenuous exercise will help protect your body from injury. The warm up allows for increased blood flow to warm up tissues and allows greater flexibility. Examples for a gentle warm up:

- Walking.
- Lunge matrix (lunges into different directions/angles).
- Easy biking or swimming.
- Dynamic stretching.

## **Tips on how to manage an exercise class**

There is a plethora of gentle exercise classes you can try, such as yoga or tai chi. There are also heavier duty classes such as cross fit, tabata, or body pump. While all the classes provide wonderful camaraderie and instruction, they are very generalized. So, not every exercise, pace, or intensity in a class is appropriate for everyone. As such, people have a natural tendency to want to keep up with their neighbors as well as keep their pride by pushing themselves to do something they may not be ready to do or unable to perform correctly.

How you can be mindful in an exercise class:

- Know yourself and your body's capabilities and limitations.
- Keep your pride and ego in check by staying within your limits.
- Realize when you may not be able to perform an exercise correctly.

Ultimately, mindfulness will ensure that you benefit from the workout instead of risking injury.

## **Tips to exercise in 3 planes of motion**

Our bodies and joints all move in 3 planes of motion:

- Sagittal – moving forward/backward or up/down
- Frontal – any movement sideways to body such as sidestepping or creating angels in the snow
- Transverse – rotating or turning

It's important to do exercises in all 3 planes of motion, even if your activity of choice is primarily moving in one plane, such as running, biking or swimming. This is also known as cross training. Why? Because....

- Doing exercises in the other planes of motion target stabilizing muscles that allow you to move safely.
- You're actually using joints and muscles in all 3 planes of motion each time you move at any given moment.
- Avoiding overuse of the primary plane's muscles in whatever activity you choose.

# Tip 13: Physical Therapy

How to know when it's time to see a physical therapist

Who knew that your everyday activities could create problems if you are not mindful? Well, as PTs are movement experts and our jobs are very physical, we know the value of being mindful as we move. We want you to take care of yourself so you don't need physical therapy because you already know how to move *mindfully* by following the tips shared in this ebook.

However, when knowing just isn't enough, then come in to physical therapy for a wellness check or prehab, a custom education and exercise plan so you can learn to prevent injury, *mindfully*.



If you want to share your story or have questions about mindful movement, please email me. I'd love to hear from you - [DeniseS@themanualtouch.com](mailto:DeniseS@themanualtouch.com) | [www.TheManualTouch.com](http://www.TheManualTouch.com)