PLAY OFTEN · HEALTH COACHING FOR MIDLIFE WOMEN JUGGLING IT ALL

Play Often

Take time to pause adulting and find your way back to play

What exactly is play?

Play is doing something for no reason except that you like it.

As kids we never had to think about it. Then jump rope turned into cardio and playing house turned into, well, an actual house. Somewhere along the way, play got filed under "I have no time for kid stuff."

When did you last do something you enjoyed so much you lost track of time? What were you doing?

I'm so busy. Why bother?

Play belongs on your health list right up there with leafy greens and exercise. Here are some of the benefits:

Reduces stress	Doing something just for fun tells your nervous system to calm down.
Sharpens the brain	Play is naturally unpredictable, which is exactly what keeps your brain flexible as you age. You may like routine. Your brain thinks it's boring.
Sparks new ideas	Play opens your mind. Ever solve a problem in the shower or on a run? Same idea.
Brings you back to you	With all the things you manage in your life, it's hard to even remember what you like. Play reminds you who you are.

So how do you start when you can't remember what you actually like to do? Let's explore.

Where do I even start? Find your play style.

The National Institute for Play sorts us into six play styles. Most of us are a mix, so there's more than one way each of us can play.

Creator

Makes things: Paintings, baked goods, woodworking. DIY to the core.

Explorer

Gets out there: New trails, new recipes, knows everything about octopuses.

Competitor

Winning is the game: Fastest mile, pickleball, sports brackets.

Organizer

Brings people together: Park day, the perfect playlist, themed parties.

Dreamer

Lives in the imagination: Novels, movies, acting.

Mover

Uses the whole body: Kitchen dance parties, hiking, climbing.

Want to know yours? Take the free quiz at nifplay.org

Like everything with health, start small

Ten minutes is all you need to begin. Here are some ideas:

1. **Play your song.** You know the one. Windows down, volume up, belt it like you're headlining. The more stares the better.
2. **Play in the weather.** Jump a puddle, crunch some leaves, catch a snowflake on your tongue.
3. **Make something with your hands.** A paper airplane, a fruit plate shaped like a smiley face.
4. **Raid your closet.** Put together the most ridiculous outfit you own and wear it to dinner.
5. **Skip to the mailbox.** Yes, skip. It's impossible not to smile while you do it.
6. **Go on a color hunt.** Grab a kid or a friend and find five red things.

Seem too easy? Then you're doing it right. Play isn't complicated.

There's no wrong way to play, which might make it the only thing in your life like that. Go be a little ridiculous. Your brain will thank you. Everyone will get over it.

General education from a health coach, not medical advice.
Sources: National Institute for Play, Play Styles (nifplay.org); Robinson, Smith, Segal & Shubin, The Benefits of Play for Adults, HelpGuide.org.

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