

## Exercise, Productivity, and Me: A Quarantine Diary

published July 2020 for **Femie Magazine** (now out of publication)

Right now, the planet has ground to an undeniable halt in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Like millions of others, I've been locked away in my home for what feels like a lifetime on top of an eternity. Still, I count myself very lucky as - for the most part - the virus has disrupted my daily routine and little else. At the same time, one scroll through Twitter or Instagram can reveal to us thousands of strangers who seem to be using their abundant time off to complete their goals and [achieve amazing things](#). If you're anything like me, you began quarantine period with a whole lot of doing nothing. As my days in quarantine ticked into weeks, I began experiencing an overwhelming sense of aimlessness.

In the throes of boredom, I downloaded TikTok which, as a somewhat self-respecting 23-year-old, I never thought I'd do. But hey, lockdown makes us do unpredictable things. Before I knew what was happening, the app's mysterious algorithm was throwing out videos of exceptionally athletic girls completing how-to workouts; it was as if TikTok was sinisterly aware of my subconscious desire to *one)* do something productive and *two)* get back to the gym. Spooky.

In the virtual jungle of GymShark leggings and yoga mats, I stumbled across the *#chloeting challenge*. Chloe Ting is a bright and bubbly athlete who provides [online exercise videos](#) and training guides - for free! As I browsed TikTok, I came across dozens of young women completing her [Two Week Shred](#) videos and tracking their progress. Whilst I wasn't going to change the world by completing this challenge, I thought having a daily goal to sign off on would alleviate my ever-growing, quarantine-induced purposelessness. **Spoiler:** it didn't exactly go as planned.

### Day One

Since I'd been going to the gym before quarantine, I wasn't expecting an intense struggle on day one. I like diving straight into exercise without much prep - mostly to get it over and done with - so Chloe's method of working out alongside you was efficient and easy to pick up.

There was a downside though. There isn't much room in my home to workout indoors and whilst I'm fortunate to have a garden right now, I was relying on the British weather to stay clear for two entire weeks. Hm.

## **Days Two - Four**

So far so good. Thanks to the unexpectedly sunny weather, I managed to keep up the momentum. At this point, it felt like there was enough variety between Chloe's videos, to keep me motivated. Overall, my experience thus far was positive - it was nice to have a purpose again, however small.

## **Day Five**

Rest day! It was a beautiful, sunny Saturday or (as I now call it) *The First Day of my Downfall*. Between a family BBQ, a bottle of wine, and my enjoyment of doing nothing, I set myself up for a fall the next day.

## **Day Six**

\*crickets chirp\*

\*a tumbleweed rolls by\*

## **Day Seven**

I took to my yoga mat very moodily this Monday morning, my temperament matching the grey clouds looming above me. I felt guilty for skipping over the weekend. Thankfully, the rain staved off long enough for my workout. By the time it was over, I was in better spirits thanks to Chloe's Lower Body Burn exercises, which are actually fun. I hate to admit it, but the age-old idea that exercise improves your mood definitely has truth to it.

## **Day Seven – Part Two!**

Exercising twice? In one day? Don't know her.

Here in the UK, people have been [completing activities](#) – from boxing to baking – and donating to charities and our National Health Service. I'd been nominated for a [5k run challenge](#) that I'd been sneakily avoiding for a few weeks. After a week straight of exercise, I felt I'd be able to complete the run without fainting and (thankfully) I was right.

I have to say, it was nice to take part in something that felt a little more meaningful beyond my own goals. To be honest, the run was a welcome change to lying on my yoga mat in a cloudy garden.

## Day Eight

Although yesterday was successful, I was getting tired of completing the same mat workouts nearly every day. I avoided Chloe's videos until 5 PM, meaning I was in my very uncomfy sports bra all day. It felt like a bizarre form of self-torture. As the day drew to a close, I didn't feel too good about myself.

I began thinking: when lockdown is already so emotionally intense, is it worth forcing myself to continue?

## Day Nine

Here's the thing, I know I said Chloe's exercises were varied at the beginning. But, at this point, if I completed one more Up & Down Plank, I might have launched my yoga mat over the fence in a fit of rage.

I missed variety, I missed going to the gym with my friends, I missed everything that makes exercise just a tiny bit more fun. With five days left to go (nearly another week!!), I decided to hang in the towel on my Two Week Shred.

*So, what went wrong?*

Don't misunderstand me, this is nothing against Chloe Ting and her videos, which are both helpful and in-depth! The problem began before I started - it was the lack of variety that was already going on around me. Unsurprisingly, I already feel like I'm trapped in the movie *Groundhog Day*, so to top that off with a repetitive daily exercise routine was perhaps misguided on my end.

More importantly, though, I didn't set this goal for the sake of being healthy and getting exercise. I was looking for something, *anything*, to make me feel productive. Ultimately, this set me up for failure. Goal-setting is everywhere we look during lockdown, and it's [common](#) to feel guilty about the aims we're trying to accomplish. Being in quarantine has instilled [depleted energy levels and increased anxiety levels](#) in almost all of us, so it's important to understand that forcing ourselves to become super-powered, creative, business-driven, exercise-obsessed doesn't have to be our number one priority.

At the moment, it feels like one half the world is telling us to take advantage of quarantine by working hard and learning new skills, as we're never going to have this much free time again. The other half is telling us to go easy on ourselves because it's already a wild and scary ride out there.

*Who do you listen to?*

From my newfound experience, I've come to understand that putting further pressure on ourselves, our minds, and our bodies won't exactly work out brilliantly. Right now, to be in a position where coronavirus has only managed to disrupt your everyday routine is, of course, a position of privilege. At the same time, this knowledge doesn't mitigate our worries. To combat these feelings, I've come to understand that it's variety I need. It's still nice to exercise, but I certainly won't be doing another challenge anytime soon. Instead, I'll stick to bike rides, jogs, and (often) no exercise at all.

The Dutch teach of a concept called "[niksen](#)," a word that means to find benefit and enjoyment in doing nothing. In nixen, the art of completing small tasks, or simply watching the world go by, fosters better mental health and creativity. Perhaps my initial approach to lockdown wasn't so bad after all. To those who are using this time to complete their life's goals, I say well done. But to those of us who are taking things a little easier, I say me too.