



8-Week Winter Movement Challenge

Mental Wellness & Physical Activity Program

Winter 2026

Program Overview

Join us for an 8-week journey that combines gentle movement with reflective mental wellness practices. This isn't about fitness goals or competition—it's about reconnecting with yourself during the darker winter months when mental health concerns can feel more noticeable.

Who This Is For

- People looking to establish a sustainable wellness routine
- Anyone experiencing winter blues or seasonal shifts in mood or motivation
- Those wanting to move their body without pressure or performance goals

What You'll Need

- Comfortable clothing for movement
- 10–45 minutes per week (depending on the week)
- Willingness to be gentle with yourself
- No special equipment required

Movement Options Each Week: Choose what works for YOU:

- Walking (outside or inside)
- Yoga or stretching
- Dancing in your living room
- Jogging or light running
- Stationary bike or cycling
- Swimming (if you have pool access)
- Weight Lifting
- Movement to music
- Nature walks or hiking
- Indoor walking (mall, home, community center)
- Any combination that feels good to your body

Participation & Safety

Participation in the Winter Movement for Wellness Challenge is voluntary. This program is intended to support general wellness and does not provide medical advice.

Participants are responsible for determining their own ability to safely participate and are encouraged to consult with a healthcare provider before beginning any new exercise routine, especially if they have existing health conditions or concerns.

Barnstable County assumes no responsibility for injuries or health issues that may arise from participation.

Movement Safety Tips:

- Start where you are—no prior fitness required
 - Listen to your body and modify as needed
 - Check weather and conditions before outdoor movement
 - Stay hydrated even in cold weather
 - Tell someone your plans for outdoor activities
 - Carry identification and a charged phone for outdoor activities
 - Rest days are part of the program
-

Share Your Journey

Use #BarnstableCountyMovesForWellness and #WinterWellnessChallenge to connect with others in our community taking this challenge. Share your experiences, favorite activities, or moments of reflection (only what feels comfortable).

Remember: This is not a competition. There are no perfect participants. Every moment you spend moving in support of your physical and mental wellbeing matters.

Weekly Program Guide

Week 1: Reconnecting With Your Body

Focus: *Grounding & Awareness*

This Week's Plan

-  Move for 5–15 minutes, 4–6 days
- Focus on how your body feels during movement
- No pace or distance goals—this is about presence, not performance

Mental Wellness Reflection:

Ask yourself after each session: *"How does my body feel after moving gently?"* Notice without judgment.

Movement Ideas:

- Walk around your neighborhood or on a treadmill
- Gentle stretching or yoga
- Dancing to 2-3 favorite songs
- Swimming laps at your own pace

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Wear supportive shoes with good traction and stick to familiar, well-maintained routes

Inside: Clear a safe space free of tripping hazards.

Week 2: Moving to Ease Tension

Focus: *Calming the Nervous System*

This Week's Plan

- Move for 10–20 minutes, 4–5 days
- Practice slow, steady movement
- Let breath guide the pace

Mental Wellness Reflection:

Breathe with your movement: inhale for 3 counts, exhale for 4 counts. This breathing pattern can support a sense of calm and steadiness during movement.

Movement Ideas:

- Slow walking indoors or outdoors
- Gentle flow yoga
- Stretching with mindful breathing
- Slow dancing or movement to calming music
- Swimming with breath awareness

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Cover your mouth and nose with a scarf to warm cold air while breathing, especially if you have asthma

Inside: Ensure good ventilation and comfortable temperature.

Week 3: Supporting Routine & Energy

Focus: *Mood & Routine*

This Week's Plan

- Move for 15–25 minutes, 5 days
- If possible, move near natural light (by a window or outside)
- Prioritize consistency over intensity

Mental Wellness Reflection:

Notice one thing during your movement that feels okay—not forced positivity, just neutral or mildly pleasant. A favorite song, a comfortable stretch, sunshine on your face. Let that be enough.

Movement Ideas:

- Walk during daylight hours when possible
- Yoga or stretching by a sunny window
- Dance to uplifting music
- Exercise class (in-person or online)
- Any movement that gets you near natural light

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Wear bright or reflective clothing to stay visible during short winter days

Inside: Position yourself near windows for natural light when possible.

Week 4: Moving Through Emotions

Focus: Emotional release & processing

This Week's Plan

-  Move for 20–30 minutes, 4–5 days
- Move with the intention to release tension, not to achieve a goal
- It's okay if emotions come up—movement can unlock what we've been holding

Mental Health Practice:

Repeat silently as you move: *"I'm allowed to feel what I feel."*

Movement Ideas:

- More vigorous walking or jogging
- Dance with expressive, bigger movements
- Yoga flows that release tension
- Swimming laps to process feelings
- Any movement that helps you release

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Check wind chill before heading out. Real feel temperatures below 20°F can be harsh—choose an indoor option if needed.

Inside: Ensure adequate space for full range of motion.

Week 5: Building Mental Resilience

Focus: Confidence & self-trust

This Week's Plan

- 🏃 Move for 25–30 minutes, 5 days
- Include at least one session on a day when you really don't feel like it
- Prove to yourself that you can show up even when it's hard

Mental Wellness Reflection:

Say to yourself as you move: *"I can care for myself through discomfort."*

Movement Ideas:

- Challenge yourself slightly (longer walk, new yoga pose, extra song)
- Try a movement type you've been curious about
- Move on a day when staying still feels easier
- Join a class (virtual or in-person) for accountability

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Dress in three layers: moisture-wicking base layer, insulating middle layer (fleece or wool), weather-protective outer layer.

Inside: Dress comfortably and have water nearby.

Week 6: Movement & Connection

Focus: *Reducing isolation & loneliness*

This Week's Plan

-  Move for 30 minutes, 4–5 days
- Invite connection: move with someone, take a class, or call a friend while you move
- If you prefer solitude, that's valid too

Mental Wellness Reflection:

Notice signs of shared life around you: other people moving, instructor's voice in a class, music that connects you to memories, community spaces. You're part of a community, even when you feel alone.

Movement Ideas:

- Walk with a friend, family member, or neighbor
- Take a group fitness class
- Dance party with household members
- Video call while walking on treadmill
- Join others at gym or community center

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Carry a charged phone and let someone know your route on longer walks.

Inside: In group settings, respect personal space and stay home if you're feeling unwell.

Week 7: Strengthening Emotional Endurance

Focus: *Tolerating stress & discomfort*

This Week's Plan

- 🏃 Move for 30–40 minutes, 4–5 days
- Allow mild discomfort (fatigue, challenging poses, cold air) without rushing to escape it
- Practice staying present when things aren't perfect

Mental Wellness Reflection:

Ask yourself during challenging moments: *"What would support me right now?"* Sometimes it's slowing down, sometimes it's finishing, sometimes it's stopping. Trust yourself.

Movement Ideas:

- Longer duration of your chosen activity
- Try a more challenging variation
- Push gently past your usual stopping point
- Practice a difficult pose or movement

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Watch for black ice in shaded areas and take smaller, slower steps.

Inside: Listen to your body—discomfort is okay, but pain is a signal to stop or modify.

Week 8: Reflection & Continuity

Focus: *Sustaining mental wellness beyond the challenge*

This Week's Plan

- 🧘 Move for 20–45 minutes, 4–5 days (your choice based on what feels sustainable)
- Choose movement that feels calming, meaningful, or simply pleasant to you
- Consider what routine you'll maintain after this program ends

Mental Wellness Reflection:

Reflect during your movement: *“What has shifted for me over these 8 weeks, and what do I want to carry forward?”*

Movement Ideas:

- Return to your favorite activities from the past 8 weeks
- Try a combination or create your own routine
- Explore something new you've been curious about
- Whatever feels sustainable long-term

Winter Safety Tip:

Outside: Trust your instincts about weather, energy, and conditions.

Inside: Modifying, shortening, or choosing an alternative is a sign of wisdom and self-care, not failure.

Program Completion Reflection

- What movement brought the most joy or calm?
 - How did mental wellness practices influence daily mood?
 - What habits feel sustainable beyond the program?
-

Additional Resources

Mental Health Support:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 (24/7)
- SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357 (24/7, free, confidential)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741

Local Resources:

- Search Barnstable County Department of Human Services' Network Of Care (NOC) Service Directory - <https://publichealth.networkofcare.org/barnstable-ma> for local mental health resources and support programs
-