



ROOTED RECLAIMERS FOUR Pillars · BOOK 2

FREE BASICS EDITION

Movement

Moving Gently, Reclaiming Agency

Dr. Stephen Thompson, DC, DACM, BCTMB, CNT, FAIHM

A companion to *Journey from the Edge* · rootedreclaimers.com

About this guide

This is the free Basics edition of *Movement*, one of four Rooted Reclaimers pillar books: Breathe, Movement, Nutrition, and Connection. The pillar books are companions to *Journey from the Edge: From Weaponized Survival to Self-Reclamation* by Dr. Stephen Thompson.

This guide explains the core idea of the Movement pillar and gives you a few practices you can start today. It takes about fifteen minutes to read.

Before you begin

This book offers education and self-directed practice. It doesn't diagnose, treat, or cure any condition, and your own medical, mental-health, and emergency providers stay in charge of your care.

- **Go at your own pace.** You can adapt, shorten, or skip any practice.
- **Stop a practice** if it causes pain, dizziness, lightheadedness, distress, or worsening symptoms. Return to your usual breathing, look around the room, and reach out for support if the feeling continues.
- **Check with your clinician first** if you're pregnant, recovering from surgery or injury, or living with a heart, lung, seizure, eating, or other medical condition that these practices could affect.
- **Use what fits.** Some pages discuss stress and trauma. You can use every part of this book without reliving a painful experience.

If you're in crisis right now: In the US, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), text **HOME to 741741** (Crisis Text Line), or call **911** if you or another person is in immediate danger. Outside the US, contact your local emergency number or find a crisis line at findahelpline.com.

Why Movement matters

I see the same contradiction in my practice every day. Many of my patients want to feel more comfortable in their bodies, and the idea of moving more feels foreign, exhausting, or even unsafe to them. After trauma, injury, or chronic illness, many people treat their own body as something to endure, manage, or ignore.

When I first started to notice how I moved, I realized I had spent years performing. I looked strong and coordinated, and I was tense in every stride and every stretch. I was always on guard, with tight muscles, always asking, “Am I safe here?” The longer I moved that way, the less comfortable I felt in my own body.

It took time and many small experiments for me to learn that gentle movement could help me feel at ease in my body again. Some days, that meant unclenching my jaw or noticing my feet on the floor. Other days, it meant dancing badly in the kitchen or taking a slow walk without headphones.

Movement gives you a way to reclaim your right to take up space, find out what feels good, and notice how your muscles and joints feel. You can start moving with more ease now, before you’re pain-free, strong, or flexible.

This guide starts where you are today. You can do every practice in it sitting down, and each one takes a few minutes. Change any instruction to fit your body.

Three core ideas

I. Many tension patterns began as protection

After trauma or chronic stress, the way a person moves often becomes a survival skill. In my clinical work, I often see these patterns:

- **Guarding (protective tension):** Muscles stay tense and ready, even when there’s no danger. I see this most often in the neck, shoulders, lower back, and hips.
- **Shrinking or disappearing:** You pull inward, with rounded shoulders, a dropped head, or a slouched posture.
- **Disconnection:** Movement feels robotic or far away.
- **Overactivity or fidgeting:** Your legs bounce, your fingers tap, or you keep shifting position. Fidgeting can also have other causes, such as ADHD, restless legs, or medication effects.

Many of these patterns started as ways to protect yourself, and they often continue after the old threat is gone. Try getting curious about them. You can notice a pattern without judging it or rushing to fix it.

2. Your nervous system changes with practice

Your nervous system plays a large part in how you feel tension, pain, and hesitation. When something registers as dangerous, often before you're aware of it, your muscles tend to tighten and your breathing speeds up. When you feel safe, your muscles often soften and your breathing slows.

Your nervous system also changes with experience, a process called neuroplasticity, and that process is part of how you learn any new skill. With repeated, gentle practice, you may find that you can relax your muscles in more situations.

Pain can also signal injury or illness, so have your clinician check any new or worsening pain.

3. Small, gentle movement is a real starting point

Micro-movements, grounding, and slow seated practices are a low-risk way to start. You choose the pace, the size of each movement, and when to stop. Some people feel relief right away, and others feel awkward or notice no change at first. Both are normal.

Try this

TAKE CARE

Before you move

- Mild, familiar stiffness that eases as you move is usually fine. Sharp, new, or worsening pain is a signal to stop.
- Skip or adapt any movement that involves a recent injury or a painful joint.
- These practices are written for sitting. If you choose to stand, keep a hand on a wall or sturdy chair.
- If you're very flexible, keep each movement small and stay in the middle of your range.
- If you often lose track of time, feel unreal, or can't feel parts of your body, talk with a mental-health professional.

Practice · A tension check

Time: about 2 minutes · **Position:** sitting

1. Let your eyes rest on something steady in the room.
2. Bring your attention to your jaw. Notice whether your teeth are pressed together. If you like, let your back teeth part a little.
3. Move to your shoulders. They may have been tense for a long time. Notice whether you can let them drop a little.
4. Check your hands. Are they gripping or resting?
5. Notice your chest and belly as you breathe. You don't need to change anything.
6. Notice your hips and lower back, and the places where you're touching the chair.
7. Name one place that feels tight and one place that feels easy or neutral.

Make it easier: Check only one area, such as your shoulders. Keep your eyes open the whole time.

Stop and switch if: Paying attention to your body brings up distress or numbness that feels like too much. Name five things you can see, then return to your day and try again another time.

Practice · Small shifts

Time: about 2 minutes · **Position:** sitting

1. Roll your shoulders up toward your ears, then let them fall naturally. Repeat three times.
2. Wiggle your fingers and toes for a few seconds.
3. Slowly turn your head to one side, then the other, staying in a small, easy range. Skip full neck circles.
4. Sway gently side to side in your chair, even just a little.
5. Notice any change in your breathing and muscles.

Make it easier: Do one step only, make each movement smaller, or picture the movement without doing it.

Stop and switch if: You feel pain, dizziness, tingling, or changes in your vision. Return to stillness and rest.

Practice · Feel your support

Time: about 1 minute · **Position:** sitting

1. Sit with your feet on the floor or on your wheelchair footrests. Notice the sensations in your feet.
2. Press your hands into your thighs and sense the pressure. Notice the chair supporting your weight.
3. Take a slow, comfortable breath. If you like, imagine roots growing from your feet or seat into the floor.

Make it easier: Keep your eyes open. Feel only your hands on your thighs.

Stop and switch if: Imagery or focusing inward feels uneasy. Skip the roots, keep your eyes open, and name a few things you can see and hear.

Some people find grounding helpful when they feel anxious, spacey, or overwhelmed, because it gives them a physical reminder that the chair and floor are supporting them right now.

Your first three days

Try one practice a day for three days. A word or a short phrase is enough.

DAY	PRACTICE	WHAT I NOTICED
1	A tension check	
2	Small shifts	
3	Feel your support	

REFLECT

- Which practice felt most doable?
- Where did you notice a change in your body, even a small one?
- What would help you come back to one of these practices tomorrow?

Add it to My Ground Plan

My Ground Plan is your own page for the practices that help you. Choose the practice from this guide that felt most doable, and write down its smallest version.

My smallest movement practice: _____

Inside the full book

- How to use this book
 - Introduction: Learning to trust movement again
 - Chapter 1: Understanding survival movement patterns
 - Chapter 2: How your nervous system shapes tension and pain
 - Chapter 3: Gentle ways to start trauma-informed movement
 - Chapter 4: Golden 8 and gentle yoga
 - Chapter 5: Tools for tracking and adapting
 - Chapter 6: Bringing movement into life
 - Chapter 7: Moving with other people
 - Quick reference and sample week
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Go deeper

The full *Movement* book has every chapter, more practices, a practice log, and the research behind each practice.

Rooted Reset includes the full book. The 30-day guided program comes with all four full pillar books, 30 daily lessons, a weekly live group session, and My Ground Plan.

- **Start free:** Starter Ground, a free seven-day introduction, at rootedreclaimers.com/starter-ground.html
- **Go further:** Rooted Reset, at rootedreclaimers.com/rooted-reset.html
- **Read the framework:** *Journey from the Edge*, available on Amazon

About the author

Dr. Stephen Thompson, DC, DACM, BCTMB, CNT, FAIHM, is an integrative clinician, educator, and author based in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. He treats people living with chronic pain, burnout, autoimmune conditions, and long-term stress, and he teaches clinicians and organizations.

He wrote *Journey from the Edge* and founded Rooted Reclaimers, the first stage of The Founded Project.

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