“I‘m a runner.” It’s one of those defining lines I use to describe myself—on dating apps, when meeting new people, when talking with friends and family. I think all of us find occasional comfort in definition—there’s a reassurance in knowing who you are, what interests you, how to articulate yourself to other people. And for me, calling myself a runner is the characteristic in which I feel most deeply rooted. I’ve been running since I was 7 years old. Since my dad signed me up for summer road races we’d run together as a family—me, him, and my brother, all plodding along on hot pavement in small Minnesota towns. Running stuck. I ran in elementary school, in middle school, in high school. The thing was, though, that through all those formative years of running, I was doing it for someone else. For my dad. For my cross country coach. I was doing it, at least partially, to prove what I could accomplish to other people; to fit the mold of the person I’d shaped myself to be. After high school, I signed up for my first marathon. It was the first running I’d done all of my own accord. I found a training plan, and I stuck with it. Most mornings of my freshman year of college I’d get up at 5:30, well before anyone else in my dorm was awake. I’d run along empty sidewalks and quiet streets of a usually bustling city. Training was hard, to be sure, but there was absolute magic in working out and pursuing a goal for no one but myself. The first marathon came, on a scorching 90-degree day in Duluth. I finished. I signed up for another. I finished that one, waited a few years, and signed up for another. I’ve done 6 marathons now, and while the training and the races themselves have taught me a lot about myself, what’s taught me even more is the rest periods in between. After all, there is no running marathons, or running at all, without the months (or sometimes years) off from training in between each race. The start of this past winter was the beginning of one such offseason. I’d recently finished marathon #6, and I could feel in my bones that I needed a break. I took nearly 3 weeks off entirely, and from there I eased into working out again—fitting in a few slow miles only when the thought sounded appealing. Then came November, a month when I went through a hell of a ride—emotionally, mentally, circumstantially. I was broken, I was exhausted, I was stuck, I felt like a shell of myself. (We won’t get into the details of it now!! But that is what happened!!) As with any of the hard times we experience in life, that period taught me lessons. One of the most important things it did was teach me exactly what I needed to be okay. One of the things I learned I needed? Movement. Of any variety, really. Sweating a little bit each day. So that became a goal of mine, all winter long. And I stuck to it. I fit in more workouts this past winter than in any offseason before. These workouts were different, though. They weren’t about intensity. They weren’t about proving anything to anyone. They were simply about feeling okay; about keeping my emotions at baseline. They were about moving in some capacity every day. If I didn’t have the time or energy, I’d will myself to do something small and approachable, at whatever pace worked for me. I’d get on the treadmill and run a mile while watching The Real Housewives or Keeping Up With the Kardashians. I’d bike for twenty minutes. I’d go to yoga. I’d bundle up and go for a walk around my snow-drenched neighborhood. It was all about consistency, and it continues to be to this day. It’s summer now. Here in Minnesota (even for those of us who like winter), we’ve waited so long for these months of green. As I look outside on the clear blue day I’m writing this, the sun is shining, the sidewalks are full of people, the trees are swaying in the breeze. I couldn’t overemphasize how idyllic it is if I tried. I still run with regularity, but the pressure I put on myself is lower than it used to be. I move my body because I know it helps with my anxiety, I know it helps to clear my mind, I know it’s essential for my well-being. I incorporate consistent movement into my schedule because I know that endorphins are real, and I know there’s joy in the simple act of propelling yourself forward, in whatever capacity that may be. Can I make that suggestion for all of us in this glorious season? Let’s get outside. Let’s go for walks. Let’s run if we want to, at whatever pace feels right. Let’s jump into unsuspecting lakes whenever the mood strikes. I might train for a marathon this year; I might not. I only will if it feels right, if I want to do it for myself. Until I decide the whys, wheres, and whens of that, I’m going to keep doing what I’ve been doing: listening to my body and mind for once in my life. Working out according to the energy and time I have. Resting when I need to. Pushing myself at other times. Counting walks and swimming in lakes and bike rides to breweries as workouts in and of themselves. Can I make that suggestion for all of us in this glorious season? Let’s get outside. Let’s go for walks. Let’s run if we want to, at whatever pace feels right. Let’s jump into unsuspecting lakes whenever the mood strikes. Let’s dance more to our favorite music (even if it’s done alone, by ourselves, in our homes). Let’s paddleboat out to the middle of a lake on a sunny afternoon; let’s kayak to the same place on another. Let’s do a few downward dogs. Let’s ease up on any pressures to work out that we’ve put on ourselves historically. There can be so much joy in movement, whether it’s walking a mile or running three.