

The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise



While physical exercise is known to be good for your body, it also can help your mind. Research continues to validate that exercise can improve mental health by reducing anxiety, depression and negative moods. When you include exercise as part of your everyday routine, you'll be reaping both physical and mental well-being benefits.

People who exercise regularly often report having better mental and emotional well-being, including the following benefits:

- **Mood boost**—Exercise triggers the production of mood-boosting chemicals in your brain, including endorphins, serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin. These four chemicals are responsible for feelings of happiness.
- **More energy**—Increasing your heart rate and boosting oxygen circulation in your body can make you feel more energized. It may seem counterintuitive, but expending energy can actually provide a spark of vitality you may need to get through the day.
- **Better sleep**—Exercise can help regulate your sleep patterns and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep. The more active you are, the more your body

pushes you to sleep and reset at night. Try to finish your exercise at least one to two hours before bed so your brain has enough time to wind down.

- **Reduced stress**—Physical activity reduces the levels of your body’s stress hormones (e.g., adrenaline and cortisol). It’s also linked to lower physiological reactivity toward stress, so exercise can also be a coping strategy for such feelings.
- **Improved memory**—Endorphins can help you concentrate and feel mentally sharp for work or other tasks.
- **Higher self-esteem**—When exercise becomes a habit, you may feel more powerful or confident. You may also feel accomplished when you meet your fitness goals.
- **Stronger resilience**—Exercise is a healthy way to build resilience and cope with mental or emotional challenges instead of turning to negative behaviors, alcohol or other substances.

Even modest physical activity can be beneficial to mental well-being. Exercise can take your mind off problems or negative thoughts by redirecting them to the activity at hand. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about incorporating exercise into your day.

Even a short burst of 10 minutes brisk walking increases our mental alertness, energy and positive mood!

