

Five Top Reasons to Get Walking and Boost Your Mental Health

Are you looking for a simple way to elevate your mental health?

Try this challenge: take a 20- to 30-minute walk outside. Does that sound easy?

According to recent studies, a brief walk outside can improve your mood, reduce stress, help manage anxiety and depression, combat brain fatigue, and delay brain aging.

You may already be familiar with the physical benefits of walking, such as maintaining strong muscles and bones, supporting weight control, reducing muscle pain, and promoting heart and lung health.

But promoting your mental health (while you exercise your body) is a very compelling reason to start walking. Bonus benefits!

Let's look more closely at the mental health benefits of walking.

1. Walking Elevates Your Mood

Regular physical activity is crucial for improving your [brain health](#) and [mental well-being](#). Daily exercise, including walking, is a brain enhancer, according to medical experts.

How does this work?

Walking and other forms of exercise release natural biochemicals into your body, including endocannabinoids and endorphins.

What are endocannabinoids and endorphins, and how do they support your mental and physical well-being?

[Endocannabinoids](#) are naturally occurring substances your body produces that mimic cannabis (but are not cannabis), according to [David Linden, Ph.D.](#), a professor of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

Endocannabinoid blood levels rise and are thought to be responsible for the euphoric feeling of a "runner's high." The release of endocannabinoids could explain why you may feel calm and happy after vigorous physical activity, including walking.

[Endorphins](#) have a different role: it is believed that the release of endorphins is related to the relief of acute muscle fatigue during and after vigorous exercise.

Endorphin levels in the blood rise. Endorphin release may explain why your muscles sometimes feel less sore and stiff after a brisk walk.

2. Walking Is A Stress Buster

Walking is just one of many physical activities that can help [reduce stress](#).

Ever wonder why you sometimes feel less stressed after even a short walk outside? Because exercise helps reduce stress.

Since both endocannabinoid and endorphin levels rise in response to exercise, you can relax, decompress, and may experience less muscle soreness. You may even forget what you were so stressed about before you started your walk.

3. Walking Decreases Anxiety and Depression

The natural release of endorphins during physical activity, such as walking, may help improve your overall mood.

It makes sense that daily walking may help reduce your [risk of depression](#).

“Exercise has a dramatic [antidepressant effect](#),” says Linden. “It blunts the brain’s response to physical and emotional stress.”

Exercise is widely recognized as an effective, [common treatment for depression](#). Since anxiety and depression often go hand in hand, you may notice your anxiety levels drop as well.

4. Walking Improves Memory and Concentration

Regular daily exercise, such as walking, may also play an important role in your brain’s cognitive function.

Cognitive brain function supports your working memory, learning, concentration, and alertness.

The hippocampus is the part of your brain responsible for these cognitive functions. Over time, the hippocampus normally ages, shrinks, and becomes more inflamed.

When you exercise, oxygen-rich blood flows throughout the body, including directly to your brain. The [hippocampus enlarges](#) and becomes more elastic and flexible in response to this increased blood flow.

This brain flexibility may help maintain or improve your memory and concentration.

5. Walking Slows the Brain Aging Process

Exercise also promotes the secretion of the natural hormone irisin, according to a [recent study](#).

Irisin specifically targets [inflammation](#) in your brain cells. This targeting activity is important because brain inflammation is thought to be an early sign of Alzheimer's disease.

Finding ways to reduce or prevent inflammation in the brain could be a game-changer for people at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

["It's hard to imagine anything better for brain health than daily exercise,"](#) says Rudolph Tanzi, M.D., a professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School.

So, there you have it. Now that you know the top five mental health benefits of exercise, get outside and start walking!