

# 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?

A brief walk outside can improve your mood, reduce stress, manage anxiety and depression, battle brain fatigue, and delay brain aging, according to [recent studies](#).

You may already be familiar with the physical benefits of walking, like maintaining strong muscles and bones, helping with weight control, and promoting heart and lung health.

But promoting your mental health (while you are exercising 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 (and Relieves Muscle Pain)

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 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 health?

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

Endocannabinoid blood levels [increase in response to exercise](#) 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 endorphin hormones is related to the relief of acute muscle fatigue during and after vigorous exercise.

Endorphin blood levels [increase in response to acute muscle fatigue](#). 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 effectively](#).

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

Since both endocannabinoid and endorphin levels rise in response to exercise, you are able to 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 elevate your overall mood.

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

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

Exercise is noted as an effective, [common treatment for depression](#). Since anxiety and depression often go hand-in-hand, you may feel your anxiety levels noticeably 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 functions.

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 experiences more inflammation.

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 flow of blood.

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

#### **5. Walking Slows the Brain Aging Process**

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

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

Finding ways to reduce or prevent inflammation in the brain could be a game-changer for people who are 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., Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School.

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