

HEALTH

How Exercise Can Improve Mental Health

Diana Murphy | Jul 1, 2019



There are benefits to exercise that go beyond just increasing muscle mass and weight loss. It's been scientifically proven that [exercise improves mental and physical health](#). According to the [World Health Organization](#), mental health is "...a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."

Most Americans do not seek out any professional help or are even aware of issues pertaining to mental health, and the reasons for this hesitation varies. Oftentimes, the very stigma of having a mental illness prevents those it affects most from even talking about it with those closest to them.

Read on for tips on how to optimize your mental wellness through exercise.

How Exercise Affects Your Body And Mind

Working out your body also works out your mind and, after speaking with your doctor prior to engaging in new physical activities, is generally safe and freely accessible to most everybody. Much like prescribed medication that treats mental illness, exercise naturally increases levels of dopamine and serotonin in the brain, resulting in an increase in overall mood and energy level. Additional benefits can include an improvement in memory, creativity, and learning; higher mental clarity and self-esteem; reduces inflammation; better social relationships; greater bodily flexibility; and increased oxygen and blood flow, and the list goes on.

There are many mental health afflictions that can be prevented, managed, or otherwise cured through physical activity. Regular exercise (at least three 20-minute workout sessions per week) can greatly decrease the risk of depression, ADHD, and stress.

What Types Of Exercises Are Most Effective?

There are a plethora of workouts and types of physical activities from which to choose. A key factor in getting the best results is consistency. [The American Heart Association](#) recommends that adults over the age of 19 get at least 150 minutes of moderate to intense physical activity per week—yes, this includes walking or cycling.

That said, exercise, as with most things in life, is all about moderation. Too much of even a good thing like working out can be detrimental, so, it's important to incorporate a few rest days into your routine. Striking the perfect balance may take some time when you're just starting out and building an exercise habit. When considering the types of activities to add to your busy schedule, recognize that age may pose certain limitations—if you're around 70 years old, it may not be a great idea to take up kickboxing. It's important to also consult your physician about your workout regimen.

Getting Started Is Easy

If starting a workout routine seems like a daunting task, you're not alone. Building a lasting habit can take about 30 days of consistent effort, but small and incremental changes can make a world of difference. For example, if you happen to have a job which requires prolonged periods of sitting, move away from your computer every 90 minutes or so to get the blood flowing—it will also give your eyes a much-needed break. Once you start to see noticeable changes (whether they be physical, mental, or both), you'll be inspired to keep at it.

The following steps can help you start a simple workout routine that can easily fit into your already busy life, no matter what your fitness goals may be.

- **Start small.** Just a few minutes of physical activity per day (a brisk 15-minute lunchtime walk, for example) is so much better than not doing anything at all.
- **Make it a habit.** Schedule your workout routine just as you plan out other important daily tasks. Doing so will seamlessly incorporate your gym time into your calendar and hold you accountable. It's also been proven that [writing down goals tends to result in them actually happening](#).
- **Focus on activities that you enjoy.** Already a cycling fanatic? Try biking as your primary mode of transportation. Fond of walking? Add a 30-minute stroll in the park to your daily habits. If your workout is enjoyable to you, it won't feel like such an obligation.
- **Make it social.** Working out with a friend or in a group setting is way more fun than going it alone. It will also ensure that you won't cancel if it means inconveniencing someone else.

Ready to get started? There's no better way of keeping both your mental and physical well-being in check.



HEALTH

10 Tips For Better Sleep

Quality sleep is essential to your health and yet, the CDC estimates that 1 in 3 Americans are sleep deprived. Luckily, we put together a list of 10 ways you can start sleeping better tonight.

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HEALTH

The 20-20-20 Rule And Other Ways to Beat Eye Strain

Many of us stare at computers all day for work, and/or stare at our TV or computer to relax when we get home. And all this screen time has some eye-boggling effects, known as Computer Vision Syndrome, or Digital Eye Strain.

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