

- Mental health

## Exercise, mental health

### Physical activity can be an outlet for your frustrations. BENEFITS: BOOST FOR WELLBEING

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We all know how important exercise is for keeping us physically healthy. But did you know that exercise can also help keep us mentally healthy?



Research shows that people who exercise regularly have better mental health and emotional wellbeing, and lower rates of mental illness.

Regular exercise seems to reduce the risk of developing mental illness. It also seems to help in treating some mental health conditions, like depression and anxiety.

Why does exercise make us feel better, mentally?

Often, people who exercise regularly do it simply because it makes them feel good. Exercise can boost your mood, concentration and alertness. It can even help give you a positive outlook on life.

And while we don't know exactly why or how exercise boosts mood, here are some possible explanations:

Regular exercise can help you sleep better. And good sleep helps to regulate your mood.

Exercise can improve your sense of control, coping ability and self-esteem. People who exercise regularly often report how good achieving a goal makes them feel.

Exercise can distract you from negative thoughts and provide opportunities to try new experiences.

It offers an opportunity to socialise and get social support if you exercise with others.

The levels of chemicals in the brain, such as serotonin, stress hormones and endorphins, change when you exercise.

Exercise increases your energy levels.

Physical activity can be an outlet for your frustrations.

Exercise can reduce skeletal muscle tension, which helps you feel more relaxed.

The physical benefits of exercise are also important for people with mental illness. It improves your cardiovascular health and overall physical health.

This is important because people with mental health issues are at a higher risk of suffering from chronic physical conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and asthma.

### Exercising for your mental health

If regular exercise is not already a part of your routine, you might be wondering how much you need to do to give your mental health a boost.

The good news is exercise doesn't have to be strenuous or take a long time. Studies show a moderate level of exercise is enough. That's roughly the equivalent of walking fast, but being able to talk to someone at the same time. The World Health Organisation suggests 30 minutes of exercise, at least five days a week.

### How to get started with exercise

It can be intimidating to start exercising if you haven't done it in a while or at all, but a plan can help you start and stick with it.

Your new exercise plan has a better chance of success if you:

Choose an activity you like, or have enjoyed in the past. Build up your activity gradually.

See your general practitioner or an accredited personal trainer before you start, and regularly as you continue your exercise plan. Write your plan in your diary or on your calendar, so it's part of your schedule.

Have an accountability friend that you train with or report to on a daily basis.

### How to be active every day

Make exercise part of your everyday activity. Try walking or cycling instead of using the car. Get off a taxi, train or bus a stop earlier and walk the rest of the way. Or spend some time walking your children to school.

Get active around the house by doing some gardening, washing the car or cleaning the windows. Your mental health will thank you.