

- Hobbies

Could a hobby be your mental health saviour?

Paisley Daily Express · 26 Jul 2022 · 15

Picking up new hobbies felt like second nature during the early days of the pandemic, when many of us had more time on our hands.



Now we're back to the business of 'normal' day-to-day life, lots of us have forgotten how important it is to have passions outside of work and caring duties.

If you've let your hobbies fall by the wayside, here are some reasons to pick them back up...

Boosting mental wellbeing "Hobbies have so many positive benefits on mental wellness," suggests Dr Tom MacLaren, consultant psychiatrist at Re:Cognition Health (recognitionhealth.com).

"They help lift mood, reduce stress and promote happiness and contentment."

You don't need to be too swayed by trends – it's all about finding activities that work for you.

"To get the full mental health benefit, it's important to find something meaningful and enjoyable, whether it be creative, musical, athletic, academic, something involving collecting or something unique or personal," adds Dr MacLaren. "Physical activities provide a multitude of mental health benefits, releasing endorphins and promoting happiness, reducing symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety."

Creative endeavours can also be good for the mind

"Music is really powerful, helping to relax, release anxiety and reduce stress, as well as evoking happy memories – it can also encourage you to start dancing, which is good for the endorphins," says Dr MacLaren.

"There are many therapeutic benefits of hobbies, such as baking, jam-making and knitting, which provide a creative outlet, sense of achievement and accomplishment, as well as providing a sense of calm and increased happiness."

Connecting with other people Hobbies can also help us create important support networks and social connections, and they're a great way to get out and meet new people. You could try joining a local sports team, or maybe a reading group at the library.

"Hobbies that involve groups are really beneficial, helping build or strengthen friendships and improve communication skills," says Dr MacLaren.

A chance to switch off

"If we don't switch off from work, we can get into very unhealthy patterns," suggests Dr MacLaren.

"Overworking and workrelated stresses can become all-encompassing, dominating our thoughts and affecting sleep, relationships and motivation, eventually leading to fatigue and burnout. Hobbies are a great distraction from work, providing an opportunity to engage in something you love, and giving a new focus and renewed energy.

"They provide a sense of achievement and accomplishment outside of the work environment, and can be a great boost to confidence and selfesteem. Having a break away from work can also give time for

the mind to rest, affording the opportunity to recharge. We can find true happiness in our hobbies.”

Fun ways to keep busy

“While it’s important to give the mind and body adequate rest, there are also huge advantages to keeping busy,” Dr MacLaren says.

It’s not about running away from life’s responsibilities – but sometimes a bit of healthy distraction can do us the world of good, physically and mentally, as well as making us happier, more rounded people.

Having hobbies can lead to

“an increase in productivity, organisation, motivation and mental alertness” as well, adds Dr MacLaren. “We may also find our creativity improving – dopamine-inducing activities may help our brains think more creatively.”

By IMY BRIGHTY-POTTS