

**No matter your age or fitness level, you can learn to use exercise as a powerful tool to deal with mental health problems, improve your energy and outlook, and get more out of life.**

# Exercise and Mental Health

HOW EXERCISE WORKS AT IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH: Moving your body decreases muscle tension, lowering the body's contribution to feeling anxious. Exercise reduces stress hormones (like cortisol and adrenalin) while also stimulating production of endorphins and serotonin, which together help foster relaxation. Serotonin is commonly known as a mood stabilizer. It can reduce depression, regulate anxiety, as well as affect your sleep cycles. It promotes brain neural growth, reduces inflammation, and increases new activity patterns that promote feelings of calm and well-being. It releases powerful chemicals in your brain that energize your spirits and make you feel good. Exercise increases the size of the hippocampus, which improves memory. Exercise is a distraction, allowing you to find some quiet time to break out of the cycle of negative thoughts. Many studies have suggested that the parts of the brain that control memory and thinking are larger in people who exercise.

**Exercise Reduces STRESS (acute, acute episodic, or chronic stress)** Exercise reduces stress hormones (like cortisol and adrenalin) while also stimulating production of endorphins and serotonin, which together help foster relaxation (commonly known as a mood stabilizer). We all experience stress and exercise is the easiest and the number one rated way to reduce stress on the Web.

**Exercise can be a treatment for DEPRESSION** Exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication, but without the side-effects.

**Exercise can be an effective ANXIETY TREATMENT** Any exercise helps but get a bigger benefit if you pay attention instead of zoning out and being mindful of what you are doing. By adding this mindfulness element, really focusing on your body and how it feels as you exercise, you'll not only improve your physical condition faster, but you may also be able to interrupt the flow of constant worries running through your head. A 2018 systematic review and meta-analysis found that aerobic exercise, especially high-intensity exercise, could be particularly beneficial.

**Exercise increases SELF-ESTEEM and HAPPINESS** It can foster your sense of self-worth and make you feel strong and powerful. As your waistline shrinks, body changes, and your strength and stamina increase, your self-image will improve. You may also earn a sense of mastery and control. Studies have found people report a higher level of vitality, enthusiasm, pleasure and self-esteem.

**Exercise promotes sharper MEMORY and THINKING** It stimulates the growth of new brain cells and helps prevent age-related decline. Many studies have suggested that the parts of the brain that control memory and thinking are larger in people who exercise.

**Exercise Boost CREATIVITY** Exercise increases the size of the hippocampus and improves memory. Researcher think that this growth in the hippocampus could be good for creativity too, since research shows that the ability to imagine the future and to think creatively also depends on this region

**Exercise effects the AGING and may REDUCE RISK OF DEMENTIA** Studies shows that regular exercise can significantly reduce the risk of developing dementia by about 30 per cent.

**Exercise makes you have more ENERGY** Exertion spurs your body to produce more mitochondria inside your muscle cells (>powerhouses of cells), boosts oxygen circulation inside your body which allows your body to function better and to use its energy more efficiently, and exertion promotes better sleep, which makes you feel well rested and energetic when you wake up in the morning.

**Exercise PROMOTES PAIN-RELIEF AND HELPS US TOLERATE PAIN** Pain is a major life stressor and it can directly impact our mental state. Exercise is well known in the physical therapy world to reduce pain.

## **Exercise REDUCES ADHD**

Exercising regularly improves concentration, motivation, memory, and mood. Exercise works in much the same way as ADHD medications such as Ritalin and Adderall.

## **Exercise and PTSD and TRAUMA**

Evidence suggests that by really focusing on your body and how it feels as you exercise, you can actually help your nervous system become "unstuck" and begin to move out of the immobilization stress response that characterizes PTSD or trauma. Instead of allowing your mind to wander, pay close attention to the physical sensations in your joints and muscles, even your insides as your body moves. Exercises that involve cross movement and that engage both arms and legs—such as walking (especially in sand), running, swimming, weight training, or dancing—are some of your best choices.

**Exercise makes you RESILIENT** Exercise can help you cope in a healthy way, instead of resorting to alcohol, drugs, or other negative behaviors. Regular exercise can also help boost your immune system.