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Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

You'll be surprised to learn what exercise and fitness can do for you!

Do you think exercise is only good for developing a lean body, strong muscles and a strong heart? Well, think again about Health and Fitness! Physical activity has been shown to help with being emotionally and mentally fit also.

While the majority of fitness research efforts focus on the physical and health benefits of exercise, there is a growing body of work demonstrating that exercise promotes wellness and mental health. Researchers at Duke University studied people suffering from depression for 4 months and found that 60% of the participants who exercised for 30 minutes three times a week overcame their depression without using antidepressant medication. This is the same percentage rate as for those who only used medication in their treatment for depression.

You don't have to be suffering from a clinical or diagnosed Mental Illness to get substantial mental health benefits from exercise and fitness. One study found that short workouts of 8 minutes in length could help lower sadness, tension and anger along with improving resistance to disease in healthy people. Many people exercise to boost confidence along with reducing anxiety and stress, all of which contribute to psychological health and well-being. So, exercise can be viewed as a preventative or wellness activity that may actually help prevent physical and emotional conditions. By the way, even short bursts of activity help individuals feel better, which means that you don't have to spend hours at the gym to gain real mental health benefits.

Judith Easton, personal training director and instructor in mindfulness meditation at Galter Life Center in Chicago, noted one reason for the feelings of well-being that are generated during and after exercise: the body's natural release of endorphins. These chemicals released by the brain are the body's natural painkillers and can lead to an increase in feelings of happiness. "Exercise leads to an increase in energy and to better sleeping patterns, which may also explain why it is so helpful to people with depression. Low energy and poor sleep are common symptoms of depression."

Clinical psychologist [Eliezer Margoles, Ph.D.](#) stated that feeling joyful and the pleasure of being in one's body is very beneficial. He urged people to "take time out, and instead of saying no to exercise say no to something else." He also cautioned against a "punitive mindset" in which some people engage during exercise, viewing it as a task or punishment instead of a pleasure. Instead, he recommends that you view movement as an affirmation of living and a function to maintain wellness.

Meditation and yoga, though more nontraditional, also lend themselves to using the body to achieve optimal levels of mental health. Both "answer the need to have down time along with the need to quiet down and look within" according to Judith Easton. This is especially important, she noted, because "in the year 2000 people absorb more information in one day than a person in the 1400s absorbed in an entire lifetime". Easton noted that "technology, including cell phones, faxes and computers, along with the mentality of moving quicker and constantly doing things, tends to lead to people forgetting that this inward focus is necessary and vital to mental health". Yoga participants often say they feel more centered and calm, along with the physical benefits of stretching and building strength.

With this information, it is easy to see how exercise is not only beneficial for the body but for emotional and mental health as well. [Click here](#) for some tips to get you started now towards feeling good. ([Health and Fitness Exercise Tips](#)).

OK, you're reading this and thinking that it sounds great, but where can you start? Judith Easton suggests something you can do RIGHT NOW to improve your [Health and Fitness and Mental Health](#).

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