

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE



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The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

While physical exercise is known to be good for your body, it also can help your mind. Research continues to validate that exercise can improve mental health by reducing anxiety, depression and negative moods. When you include exercise as part of your everyday routine, you'll be reaping both physical and mental well-being benefits.

People who exercise regularly often report having better mental and emotional well-being, including the following benefits:

- **Mood boost**—Exercise triggers the production of mood-boosting chemicals in your brain, including endorphins, serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin. These four chemicals are responsible for feelings of happiness.
- **More energy**—Increasing your heart rate and boosting oxygen circulation in your body can make you feel more energized. It may seem counterintuitive, but expending energy can actually provide a spark of vitality you may need to get through the day.
- **Better sleep**—Exercise can help regulate your sleep patterns and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep. The more active you are, the more your body pushes you to sleep and

reset at night. Try to finish your exercise at least one to two hours before bed so your brain has enough time to wind down.

- **Reduced stress**—Physical activity reduces the levels of your body's stress hormones (e.g., adrenaline and cortisol). It's also linked to lower physiological reactivity toward stress, so exercise can also be a coping strategy for such feelings.
- **Improved memory**—Endorphins can help you concentrate and feel mentally sharp for work or other tasks.
- **Higher self-esteem**—When exercise becomes a habit, you may feel more powerful or confident. You may also feel accomplished when you meet your fitness goals.
- **Stronger resilience**—Exercise is a healthy way to build resilience and cope with mental or emotional challenges instead of turning to negative behaviors, alcohol or other substances.

Even modest physical activity can be beneficial to mental well-being. Exercise can take your mind off problems or negative thoughts by redirecting them to the activity at hand. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about incorporating exercise into your day.

5 Tips for Managing Anxiety

Nearly 40 million Americans suffer from anxiety—persistent, excessive fear or worry in situations that are not threatening—according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Anxiety can present itself differently for everyone that experiences it, which means not everyone will be able to manage their condition in the same way. What works for one person may not work for another, and vice versa. That being said, if you're looking for ways to manage your anxiety, check out the following five tips:

- 1. Be active.** Regular physical activity can significantly improve your mental health and divert your attention away from things that trigger your anxiety. Regular exercise can also increase concentration and willpower, which may help alleviate certain symptoms of anxiety.
- 2. Prioritize good sleeping habits.** Sleep has been shown to improve mental health. Adults should aim for seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Having a hard time sleeping can be a common symptom of anxiety.
- 3. Limit caffeine consumption.** Since caffeine is a stimulant, it can increase your chances of experiencing anxiety symptoms, such as increased heart rate. Reactions to caffeine vary, so it's important to monitor yours, especially

if it's triggering any symptoms of anxiety.

- 4. Eat a balanced diet.** Low blood sugar, dehydration and chemicals found in certain foods can alter some people's moods. If you notice a negative pattern in your mood from particular foods, try eliminating or limiting the amount of those foods you consume. It's also important to eat a balanced diet of complex carbohydrates, fruits, vegetables and lean proteins.

5. Practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness, such as meditation, can help bring awareness to the present moment. Since anxiety pertains to worried thoughts about the future, practicing mindfulness can help train your brain to refocus those thoughts.

Anxiety affects millions of people, so there's a good chance either you or someone you know is impacted by it. If you think you may have anxiety or any other mental health conditions, it's first important to seek professional help before trying to treat yourself at home. For more information on anxiety and management tips, reach out to your health care provider.

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