# How Movement Can Help Your Mental Health

Incorporating exercise into a person’s daily routine provides several physical and mental benefits. An exercise routine doesn’t have to be intense or incredibly complicated. Even taking a walk a few times a week can bring substantial benefits to a person’s mental health. [Research](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1424736/pdf/pubhealthrep00100-0085.pdf?utm_source=blog_en&utm_campaign=friends-not-family-keep-the-brain-healthy&utm_content=secondary_cta) has shown that regular exercise can help prevent and treat a variety of mental health concerns. Mental health concerns such as depression or mood disorders can be drastically improved by engaging in regular movement. Exercise can be so helpful for people struggling with mental health that professionals can prescribe exercises as a part of a patient’s treatment.

**Physical Benefits**

As most of us probably already know, exercise has physical benefits to help us age more efficiently and maintain our health. Oftentimes, these physical benefits will become mental benefits, too. When a person feels better physically, they will be more likely to feel better mentally.

* One of the most obvious physical benefits of exercise is having a healthy physical body. Contrary to common beliefs, having a healthy physical body is not always centered around weight. Having a healthy body can mean having strength or having a strong immune system.
* [Increased blood flow](https://coastalvascular.net/5-exercises-to-improve-circulation/) can also be a benefit for people who engage in exercise. When a person’s blood flow is increased through exercise, they are also strengthening their heart health. Increased blood flow can also bring benefits to a person’s mood, which we will discuss in more detail below.
* Exercise can also improve a person’s [energy](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9206544/). This can feel counterintuitive because exercise can cause fatigue. However, a routine of regular exercise can help improve a person’s energy levels over time.

**Mental Benefits**

Most people probably understand the physical benefits of movement. However, there are also many mental health benefits as well.

*Reduces Anxiety and Stress*

* One of the ways that movement helps with mental health is that it reduces anxiety and stress. This is because when a person engages in exercise, they reduce levels of adrenaline and cortisol in their body. These hormones are classified as stress hormones. Lower levels of [stress hormones](https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/exercising-to-relax) mean there will be lower levels of stressful or anxious feelings.

*Mood Improvement*

* Engaging in regular exercise also helps improve a person’s mood. This is because when a person engages in exercise, their body will naturally release [endorphins](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-truth-behind-runners-high-and-other-mental-benefits-of-running). Endorphins are often referred to as “feel-good chemicals” because they make us feel better. These chemicals are released after a person engages in exercise. Endorphins can also help decrease pain and stress in the body. These “feel-good” chemicals can be incredibly helpful for someone struggling with depression or other related mood disorders.

*Mindfulness*

* Another benefit of engaging in exercise is developing mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present moment. This can be practiced during exercise as a way to stay engaged. When a person practices mindfulness, they will likely see improvements in their outlook and mood. Mindfulness can also be practiced if a person exercises in nature. Some people believe that nature has [healing powers](https://www.uc.edu/news/articles/2023/08/the-healing-power-of-nature.html#:~:text=The%20science%20of%20the%20healing%20power%20of%20nature&text=There%20are%20numerous%20studies%20that,outside%20and%20reap%20its%20benefits.). Based on a study from The World Health Organization, spending time in nature helped improve participants' mood, mindset, and overall mental health. Exercising in nature also has the added benefit of maintaining our body’s natural [circadian rhythms](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11221196/). Everyone has a circadian rhythm that is referred to as the body’s clock. Our circadian rhythms control when we wake up and go to sleep. One way to activate this is by a person spending time in sunlight first thing in the morning. When a person exposes themselves to sunlight at the start of their day, they are signaling to their body that their day is starting.

*Improve Sleep Quality*

* Getting quality sleep is essential for maintaining positive mental health. Exercise can help improve the [quality](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10503965/#:~:text=Studies%20have%20shown%20that%20regular,being%20for%20individuals%20and%20communities.) of a person’s sleep. This means they have an easier time falling asleep, staying asleep, and an overall deeper sleep. Daily movement can make our bodies tired easier, which can help people who have trouble falling asleep or if they struggle with insomnia.

*Cognitive Benefits*

* When a person engages in regular exercise, they will likely experience cognitive improvements as well. Exercise is [shown](https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/exercise-can-boost-your-memory-and-thinking-skills#:~:text=Exercise%20can%20also%20boost%20memory,or%20contribute%20to%20cognitive%20impairment.) to improve memory and focus. These skills can help a person succeed in school or work. How well a person performs at work or school can also impact their self-worth. Improving this memory and focus will improve almost all areas of a person’s life.

**How to Start an Exercise Routine**

It may be overwhelming for a person to start an exercise routine if they haven’t had one before. The best way to start is to take small, manageable steps to add movement to your routine. If a person creates a rigorous exercise routine for themselves to follow but they don’t have time to complete it, they will be setting themselves up for failure. Instead, it’s more helpful to add small amounts of exercise or movement into each day. By creating routines that include exercise, people can make exercise a part of their daily lives.

It can be common for people to be nervous about exercising if it’s not something they are familiar with. If a person is self-conscious or suffers from low self-esteem, they may struggle to engage in exercise alone. One way to combat this fear is to exercise with someone else. When people exercise together, they are also reaping the social benefits as well. A person can do this by reaching out to someone they trust in their life and explaining how they can help. Another way to help someone struggling to create a new routine is to find exercise classes. There are so many different types of exercise classes offered both online and in person. This can be a great way for someone new to exercise to add it into their routine and in turn improve their mental health.

When someone is struggling with their mental health, the last thing they likely want to do is exercise. However, exercise is a powerful tool to prevent and treat a variety of mental health concerns. By engaging in regular exercise, a person can expect to see improvements in their mental health. Movement helps improve our mental health by reducing stress and anxiety, improving mood improvement, increasing mindfulness, improving sleep quality, and improving cognitive abilities. Everyone has the power to change their behaviors and develop new routines. Sometimes, it can be helpful to work with a therapist or online counselor to find a way to fit exercise into your life. There is nothing wrong with needing extra help to incorporate something we know will be helpful in the long run. We understand it can be scary to start therapy, but we assure you it will be worth it. If you are interested in working with us, we are here to help! Please reach out to us [here](https://michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php).

**References**

[https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1424736](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1424736/pdf/pubhealthrep00100-0085.pdf?utm_source=blog_en&utm_campaign=friends-not-family-keep-the-brain-healthy&utm_content=secondary_cta)

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