

Exercise And Mental Well Being.

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INTRODUCTION:

Exercise though at the first thought; we are likely to associate it to the bodily benefits like weight control, muscle physiques, physical stamina and aerobic capacity, it does have a lots of beneficial effects on the mental health. ¹ One need not be fitness fanatics to reap the benefits. Even the modest amount of work out is likely to be fruitful. ^{1, 2} To begin with, exercises can be a great stress reliever. It has positive impact in the mood, helps to sleep better and can boost the sex life. Exercises can have profound effect in many mental illness like depression, anxiety, ADHD and others. Age need not be a barrier and people who exercise regularly tend to do so because it gives them an enormous sense of well-being.¹

Exercise directly affects the [brain](#) in many ways. Exercise is well known to stimulate the body to produce endorphins and enkephalins, the body's natural feel-good [hormones](#). Regular exercise [increases the volume of certain brain regions](#), in part through better blood supply that improves neuronal health by improving the delivery of oxygen and nutrients; and through an increase in neurotrophic factors and neurohormones that support neuron signaling, growth, and connections.³ Exercise seems to have an effect on certain chemicals in the brain, like dopamine and serotonin. Brain cells use these chemicals to communicate with each other, so they affect your mood and thinking. ²

Of critical importance for mental health is the hippocampus, an area of the brain involved in memory, [emotion regulation](#) and learning. Studies in other animals show convincingly that exercise leads to the neurogenesis in hippocampal region, with preliminary evidence suggesting this is also true in humans. ³

Much mental ill health is characterized by a cognitive inflexibility that restricts our ability to process or even acknowledge new information, and reduces our ability to use what we already know to see new solutions or to change. It is therefore plausible that exercise leads to better mental health in general, through its effects on systems that increase the capacity for mental flexibility. ³

EXERCISE AND STRESS:

Stress can produce myriads of symptoms like tense muscle, especially in face, neck, and shoulders, causing back or neck pain, or painful headaches. One may also experience insomnia, heartburn, stomachache, diarrhea, or frequent urination. The worry and discomfort of all these physical symptoms can in turn lead to even more stress, creating a vicious cycle between your mind and body. Exercising is an effective way to break this cycle. As well as releasing endorphins in the brain, physical activity helps to relax the muscles and relieve tension in the body. ¹

EXERCISE AND DEPRESSION:

Studies show that exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication.^{1, 2} In addition to relieving depression symptoms, research also shows that maintaining an exercise schedule can prevent you from relapsing.¹

EXERCISE AND ANXIETY:

Exercise is a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. It relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins.¹

EXERCISE AND DEMENTIA:

Physical activity in early, mid and late life is associated with a lower risk of cognitive decline and dementia. The benefits of exercise are clear when considering other factors associated with the risk of developing dementia. People who exercise regularly are less likely to experience heart disease and stroke, both factors that are associated with an increased risk of developing dementia. Exercise is also important in reducing the risk of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and obesity, all of which are risk factors for dementia. Physical exercises are associated with less cognitive decline in older people. Other studies have found that people who exercise experience a slower loss of brain tissue as they age.⁴

EXERCISING FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH:

Exercise doesn't have to be strenuous or of long duration. Studies show a moderate level of exercise is enough. That's roughly the equivalent of walking fast, but being able to talk to someone at the same time. Experts suggest 30 minutes of exercise, at least five days a week, can make a big difference. It can be one 30 minute session, or several shorter 10-15 minute sessions. A good advice is to choose an activity one likes or have enjoyed in the past.⁵

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