



# EXERCISE

Staying active can benefit so many aspects of your health and can even prevent physical and mental health symptoms from worsening. It's important to incorporate exercise daily to ensure your body and your mind are healthy.

## EXERCISING BENEFITS NEARLY ALL ASPECTS OF A PERSON'S HEALTH

In addition to helping control weight, it can improve the chances of living longer, the strength of bones and muscles, and your mental health.<sup>1</sup>



## WHEN A PERSON DOESN'T GET ENOUGH EXERCISE, THEY ARE AT INCREASED RISK FOR HEALTH PROBLEMS

These include cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and metabolic syndrome.<sup>2</sup>



## EXERCISE INCREASES A VARIETY OF SUBSTANCES THAT PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN BRAIN FUNCTION

### BDNF

BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor) is a protein that creates and protects neurons (nerve cells) in the brain, helps these cells to transmit messages more efficiently, and regulates depression-like behaviors.<sup>3,4</sup>

### ENDORPHINS

Endorphins are a type of chemical messenger (neurotransmitter) that is released when we experience stress or pain to reduce their negative effects and increase pleasure throughout the body.<sup>5</sup> Endorphins are also responsible for the euphoric feeling known as a "runner's high" that happens after long periods of intense exercise.

### SEROTONIN

Serotonin is another neurotransmitter that increases during exercise. It plays a role in sending messages about appetite, sleep, and mood.<sup>6</sup> It is the target of a medications known as SSRIs or SNRIs, which are used to treat anxiety and depression.

### DOPAMINE

Dopamine is involved in controlling movement and the body's reward response system. Due to its role in how the body perceives rewards, it is heavily involved with addictions. When amounts of this chemical messenger are low, it is linked to mental health conditions including depression, schizophrenia, and psychosis.<sup>7</sup>

### GLUTAMATE & GABA

Glutamate and GABA (Gamma-amino butyric acid) both act to regulate the activity of nerve cells in the parts of the brain that process visual information, determine heart rate, and affect emotions and the ability to think clearly.<sup>8</sup> Low levels of GABA have been linked to depression, anxiety, PTSD, and mood disorders.<sup>9</sup>

# EXERCISE CAN HELP PREVENT MENTAL ILLNESSES AND IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF TREATMENT

Just 1 hour of exercise a week is related to lower levels of mood, anxiety and substance use disorders.<sup>10</sup>



Among people in the U.S., those who make regular physical activity a part of their routines are less likely to have depression, panic disorder, and phobias (extreme fears).<sup>11</sup>

One study found that for people with anxiety, exercise had similar effects to cognitive behavioral therapy in reducing symptoms.<sup>12</sup>



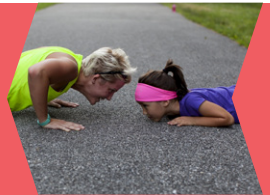
For people with schizophrenia, yoga is the most effective form of exercise for reducing positive and negative symptoms associated with the disorder.<sup>13</sup>

## HOW MUCH EXERCISE SHOULD YOU BE GETTING?



Exercise doesn't have to be done for hours on end. Ten minutes of moderate or vigorous activity at a time, fifteen times a week will get you to the recommended amount.

Muscle strengthening activities should be incorporated into your exercise routine twice a week. This includes yoga, lifting weights, resistance band exercises, and things like push-ups and sit-ups. Your muscles should be tired by the time you are finished with your exercises, but make sure you aren't trying to lift too much too soon or you could injure yourself.



You don't have to have a gym membership to make exercise a part of your life! Picking physical activities that are easy to incorporate into things you already do and having a strong social support system are important in incorporating exercise into your routine.



## TAKE THE #4MIND4BODY CHALLENGE!

Join Mental Health America this May as we challenge ourselves each day to make small changes – both physically and mentally – to create huge gains for our overall fitness. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram for the challenge of the day and share your successes by posting with #4mind4body.

If you are taking steps to live a healthy lifestyle but still feel like you are struggling with your mental health, visit [www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org) to check your symptoms. It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, we'll give you information and help you find tools and resources to feel better.

For more information on personal well being, visit the navigating life's journey blog at [www.uaex.edu/nlj](http://www.uaex.edu/nlj)



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