

Lift Your Mood with Exercise

Got the blues? Sweat them out.

Whether it's a brisk walk around the neighborhood or hitting the weights at the local gym, regular exercise can improve your emotional well-being and can even help lessen the impact that depression may have on your mind and body.

How exercise helps to alleviate feelings of depression

Intense exercise stimulates the release of endorphins. The body's natural painkillers, endorphins are known to promote a sense of well-being and increased feelings of happiness. Additionally, repetitive movements like those used in walking, swimming or cycling increase production of serotonin, a chemical found in the brain. Studies suggest that there could be a link between low levels of serotonin and depression.

Exercise also counters the physical symptoms of depression, such as low energy, loss of appetite and lack of quality sleep. But exercising too close to bedtime can make sleep difficult. In general, staying in shape helps promote an increased sense of self-esteem and control over one's life.

However, exercise is not a cure for clinical depression. If you are experiencing changes in appetite and weight, loss of energy, changes in sleeping habits, or feelings of sadness or hopelessness that have lasted for a couple of weeks or longer, you may be suffering from clinical depression. If so, please seek professional help. Depression is a very common and treatable condition.

The right exercise for you

Any form of exercise will give you more energy and may help you alleviate the blues. Low-intensity activities like walking and non-aerobic workouts like weight training can have the same mood-enhancing effects as running and other aerobic activities.

Beginning an exercise program and staying motivated can be tough. Try these tips for planning an exercise program that will work for you.

- Select an activity you enjoy.
- Try to do it for at least 20-30 minutes, three to four days a week.
- Create a routine that is easy to follow and set reasonable goals for yourself.
- Vary your exercise times and activities to prevent boredom.
- Look into scheduled exercise classes.
- Enlist the help of an exercise buddy or a personal trainer.
- Exercise in a safe, relaxing setting — especially when doing outdoor activities. For example, use quiet neighborhood streets to run or walk instead of crowded city sidewalks, and avoid exercising out doors after dark if possible.



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Remember that with every step, lap or hike, you're on your way to feeling better inside and out.

Did You Know?

You can get a moderate amount of activity each day just by doing one of the following:

Activity	Duration
Gardening	30-45 min
Walk up and down stairs	15 min
Wash windows or floors	45-60 min
Push a stroller 1 mile	30 min
Shoot baskets	30 min
Rake leaves	30 min
Jump rope	15 min

Start slowly to avoid injury. It's normal to have some soreness after exercising, but if you continue to feel pain two hours after exercising you may have done too much. Don't hesitate to contact your doctor if the pain continues and you think you may have injured yourself. And if you have a medical condition or have not been exercising on a regular basis, be sure to consult your physician before starting a new exercise program.

Healthy body — healthy mind

Exercising can be fun and easy. Take the stairs instead of the escalator or a walk around the neighborhood with a friend. Whatever you choose, remember that with every step, lap or hike, you're on your way to feeling better inside and out.

Resources

<http://www.justmove.org/>

American Heart Association's exercise Web site provides fitness resources and tips.

<http://www.fitness.gov/>

The President's Council on Physical Fitness includes exercise resources, tips and articles.

<http://www.shapeup.org/>

Offers advice and tips on nutrition, weight management and fitness.

Meditate the blues away

Meditation is a powerful tool for improving your physical and emotional health. What's more, it's easy to learn, costs virtually nothing, and can be practiced at home.

One of the most popular methods of meditation is called the "relaxation response." Developed by Dr. Herbert Benson, M.D., and founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute at Harvard Medical School, this simple technique only takes 10 to 20 minutes a day.

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.
4. Breathe through your nose. Pay attention to your breathing. As you breathe in and out, repeat a word, phrase, or sound to yourself. Choose a word or phrase that is meaningful, so focusing on it will feel natural.
5. Let the relaxation occur at its own pace. It's okay if distracting thoughts enter your mind. Simply acknowledge them and go back to the word or phrase you're repeating.
6. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Don't stand up for a few minutes.

To learn more about the benefits of meditation, visit www.meditationsociety.com.

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