



## Physical activity can boost your mental health

We all know that physical activity is good for our bodies since it helps to prevent excess weight gain, builds muscle, keeps our hearts healthy, and adds years to our life. But did you know exercise is a scientifically-proven mood booster?

Physical activity can help with combating common mental health challenges like stress, anxiety, depression, and even isolation as it can provide a social bond with others. Physical activity helps to relax muscles, relieve tension in the body and increase blood flow to our brain. As a result, our brain gets more oxygen and nutrients, and releases those feel-good hormones called endorphins.

You may have heard the term “runner’s high,” which is a deeply relaxing state of euphoria we feel when we exercise and break a sweat. As you hit your stride, your endorphin levels increase. This can have a profound impact on our mental state and keeps us feeling good for many hours. But you don’t need to run a marathon to experience this. Research indicates that modest amounts of exercise can also boost your energy, improve memory and mood, and help you sleep better. Physical activity can also lead to a drop in our stress hormones, cortisol and adrenaline, as well as improve how you respond emotionally to the ups and downs of life. Plus, regular aerobic exercise has been found to be an effective antidepressant intervention for adults diagnosed with depression.

No matter your age, it’s important to stay physically active so that you can keep your brain and body healthy and happy and prevent cognitive decline. If possible, try to get 30 minutes or more of moderate to intense exercise 3-5 days a week. However, even smaller amounts of activity can make a difference. For example:

- Enjoy the spring weather by taking a walk outside.
- Join a local gym or find a fitness class you are interested in such as yoga, tai chi or Zumba.®
- Tune up your bicycle and go for a ride at a park or on a bike path.
- Work in your yard or plant a garden.

### **Mental Health Awareness Month**

Since 1949, May has been observed as “Mental Health Awareness Month” in the United States. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. If mental health issues are disrupting your life, reach out for help. That might mean calling a family member for emotional support or contacting your health care provider. You can also visit [mentalhealth.gov](https://www.mentalhealth.gov) for additional resources and helpful information.