

EXERCISE AND MENTAL HEALTH

GET ACTIVE TO IMPROVE YOUR MOOD AND STRESS LESS

There are many good reasons to learn to manage stress. While stress generally starts inside your head and can affect your mood and your sleep, it can have physical effects too.

STRESS AND YOUR HEALTH

If you're constantly under stress for any reason, your body can be exposed to higher than normal levels of hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline — and this can affect your health, contributing to a range of problems from headaches to depression and even high blood pressure.

People who are stressed may also be less likely to eat well or find time to exercise, or use ways to cope with stress that can damage their health such as over-eating, smoking or over-use of alcohol and other drugs.

But an antidote may be at hand — regular exercise.

HOW CAN EXERCISE HELP YOU MANAGE STRESS?

Although research has found that regular exercise can help reduce anxiety and improve mood, it's not yet known why. Possible reasons are that regular exercise:

- **Helps boost production of 'feel-good' chemicals in your brain**
Physical activity can help increase levels of the "feel good" chemicals, endorphins and serotonin.
- **Helps distract your mind from anxious thoughts**
Whether you're taking aim at a soccer ball or trying to get a yoga posture right, you're focused on the activity rather than on your stress.
- **Helps improve sleep**
Lack of sleep has been found to contribute to stress and may also increase the risk of depression.
- **Increase your energy levels**
With more energy you may feel better.

WHAT EXERCISE CAN I DO TO HELP IMPROVE MY MOOD?

It's important to choose an activity you enjoy that fits easily into your lifestyle, not one that creates more stress. Research suggests that both aerobic activity (exercise that significantly raises your heart rate, such as jogging cycling and swimming) and resistance exercises (such as weight training or Pilates) may be helpful for depression. No matter what activity you choose or what intensity you exercise at, every little bit can be beneficial to help improve your mental and physical health.

TIPS FOR MAKING AN EXERCISE HABIT STICK

- **Schedule regular exercise into your calendar**
Just like any other commitment.
- **Exercise with a friend or in a group**
It makes exercise a social activity and helps keep you motivated.
- **Mix it up**
Going for a walk is good, but so is a bike ride, a swim or a dancing class. Including a variety of activities can make exercising more enjoyable.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Black Dog Institute
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

beyondblue
www.beyondblue.org.au

Sources:

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