THE CATALYST

Move to boost your mental health

Physical activity is not just beneficial for maintaining a healthy body, but also for improving mental health. In fact, research shows that exercise is one of the most effective tools to manage mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Even modest levels of physical activity or low-intensity exercise are beneficial.

By: Caelie Townsend | Posted: March 23, 2023

Estimated reading time: 3 minutes

Physical activity is not just beneficial for maintaining a healthy body, but also for improving mental health. In fact, research shows that exercise is one of the most effective tools to manage mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Even modest levels of physical activity or low-intensity exercise are beneficial.

Key benefits of physical activity for mental health:

Reduces stress and anxiety

Physical activity is a natural stress reliever. When you exercise, your body releases endorphins, which are feel-good chemicals that help reduce stress and anxiety. Regular exercise can also help reduce the levels of cortisol, the hormone that is released during stress. By reducing cortisol levels, exercise can help calm the mind and reduce feelings of anxiety.

Improves mood

Exercise can improve mood almost immediately by increasing the production of serotonin and dopamine, two chemicals in the brain that are associated with feelings of happiness and well-being. Regular exercise can also help reduce feelings of fatigue and improve energy levels, which can have a positive impact on mood.

Boosts self-esteem

Regular physical activity can help improve self-esteem and self-confidence. When you exercise, you are setting goals and achieving them, which can give you a sense of accomplishment and pride. Exercise can also help improve body image, which can lead to a more positive self-image.

Enhances cognitive function

Exercise has been shown to improve cognitive function, including memory, attention, and processing speed. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which helps supply oxygen and nutrients to the brain cells. Regular exercise can also increase the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that is important for the growth and maintenance of brain cells.

Reduces symptoms of depression

Regular exercise has been shown to be as effective as medication for treating mild to moderate depression. Exercise increases the production of endorphins and serotonin, which can help improve mood and reduce feelings of depression. Engaging in exercise can also help increase social interaction, and reduce feelings of isolation which can have a positive impact on mental health.

Physical activity is an important aspect of maintaining good mental health. Regular exercise can help reduce stress and anxiety, improve mood, boost self-esteem, enhance cognitive function, and reduce symptoms of depression. Also, exercise is less costly and is free of the negative side effects that are common in drug therapies. So, whether it’s a daily walk, a yoga class, or even just moving more, incorporating physical activity into your routine can have a positive impact on your mental health.

Author: Caelie Townsend

Mental Health Commission of Canada
https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/
350 Albert Street, Suite 1210 Ottawa ON K1R 1A4
Tel: 613.683.3755 | Fax: 613.798.2989
mhccinfo@mentalhealthcommission.ca