

May 2017

## The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

I'm sure you've heard countless times that exercising helps you gain energy and lose weight. Well, that's certainly true. But there are also mental health benefits to exercising — some that can be truly life-changing! No matter how much you hate putting on those sneakers and heading to the gym, the mental health benefits of regular exercise cannot, and should not, be ignored.

### **Improve Your Mood**

Need to relax after a hard day? Put down that glass of wine! Physical exercise can do much more for your mood, and you don't have to do an intense workout to reap the benefits. Studies have shown that any physical activity stimulates several chemicals in your brain that allow you to feel more relaxed.

### **Improve Self-Confidence**

The most obvious and well-known benefit of exercising is that it affects your physique, helping you lose or maintain your weight. If you feel better about how you look physically, you'll naturally feel better mentally. Being happy with your appearance may lead you to exercise regularly, which can boost your confidence and improve your self-esteem.

### **Get More Energized**

Feeling tired by 2 pm? Regular physical activity can strengthen your muscles and boost your endurance. Exercise sends oxygen and nutrients to your tissues and allows your cardiovascular system to work more efficiently. When your heart and lungs work better, you have more energy during the day. So getting your body in motion puts more pep in your step!

### **Take Your Mind off of Negative Thoughts**

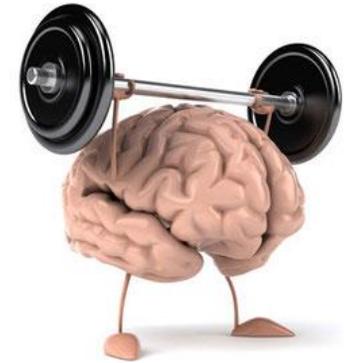
Exercise can get you out of the house and take your mind off the constant flood of thoughts in your mind. Whenever you have unscheduled time, your thoughts have more potential to become negative. Using that time for physical activity can help redirect your thinking in a more positive and mindful direction.

### **Cope in a Healthy Way**

Some people cope with life's challenges by drinking, watching TV, eating excessively, or avoiding. But these strategies are ineffective and often make the problem worse. Using exercise as a way to manage anxiety, depression, and other difficulties can be a healthy coping strategy.

### **Release Happy Chemicals**

Studies show that the chemicals called endorphins, which are released during exercise, help reduce symptoms of depression. When endorphins are released in the brain, immune system chemicals that can worsen depression are reduced and body temperature increases, producing a calming effect.



**Working out can have positive effects far beyond the gym. Gaining self-confidence, getting out of a funk, and even thinking smarter are some of the motivations to take time for exercise on a regular basis.**

Modified from article by Psych Central <https://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2017/02/14/7-unexpected-mental-health-benefits-of-exercising/>

## **HOW TO USE YOUR EAP:**

**ERC** is your company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). For additional information, visit our website [www.ERCincorp.com](http://www.ERCincorp.com) or simply call 1-800-222-8590.