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How Exercise Impacts Your Mental Health

Exercise offers preventative and therapeutic psychological benefits. It can reduce the risk of depression and chronic pain, as well as neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. Depression, anxiety, eating addictive disorders and body dysmorphic disorders are all responsive to exercise as an adjunct to treatment. Even some symptoms of schizophrenia improve with exercise. Depression is the most studied mental health disorder in relation to exercise. With depression the evidence points to benefits that are comparable to both medication and therapy.

Why can exercise have anti-depressant effects?

- Serotonin levels change with exercise and improve sleep. With better sleep, mood improves
- Exercise releases endorphins in the body, a chemical in the brain associated with positive mood
- The breakdown of muscle tension through exercise can improve sleep and decrease physical pain and discomfort associated with depression
- Exercise can lead to improvements in self-esteem and feelings of self-worth
- It can interrupt cycles of negative thoughts and rumination

What type of exercise proves a valuable aide to medication and therapy?

- Aerobic exercise
- Weight training
- Higher intensity workouts tend to be more effective, although lower intensity still have benefits

Exercise and the Brain: What impact can exercise have on cognitive functioning?

- Enhances academic performance in youth
- Aids in stroke recovery
- Reduces age-related memory loss
- Reduces the risk of Alzheimer's and non-Alzheimer's dementia
- Improves cognitive performance, emotional states, coordination and planning in the elderly and those with Alzheimer's

How might exercise improve cognitive function?

- Exercise increases brain volume (the size of the brain)
- Exercise increases blood flow and vascularization, that is the formation of blood vessels and capillaries in the brain

Even brief counseling can motivate many people to make changes in the amount of exercise they get. Given the low risk of side effects and the substantial positive effects, it is an important option to consider when you are looking to improve your mental well-being.

Modified from: <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/dbt/2011/11/how-exercise-impacts-your-mental-health/>

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