

Exercise and Physical Activity

Exercise has many benefits, not only for your physical health but also for your mental health. In your brain, exercise stimulates chemicals that improve your mood and the parts of the brain responsible for memory and learning.

Benefits of exercise

Physical activity and exercise has many benefits. It can:

- help you to feel better, even if you're feeling okay
- reduce the risk of illnesses like heart and lung disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, cancer, dementia, Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease
- help people recover from a stroke and many other illnesses and conditions
- help you to lose weight if you want to, which is good for your health overall and might be good for your self-esteem

Mental health benefits of exercise

Exercise releases chemicals like endorphins and serotonin that improve your mood. It can also get you out in the world, help to reduce any feelings of loneliness and isolation, and put you in touch with other people. If you exercise regularly, it can reduce your stress and symptoms of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, and help with recovery from mental health issues. It can also improve your sleep.

Exercise and the mind

Exercise pumps blood to the brain, which can help you to think more clearly and increases the size of the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory. It also increases the connections between the nerve cells in the brain. This improves your memory and helps protect your brain against injury and disease.

The first page of **The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise worksheet** resource lists the mental illnesses that can benefit from exercise, it provides examples of healthy workouts, and it gives tips to help you follow through with your goal. The second page of this printout provides a template for children to begin planning when and how they would like to begin their exercise routine. This section of the worksheet can be used as a prompt to get you thinking about your exercise goals, and how they can realistically be achieved.

Resources:

The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

Fitness Plan Worksheet

Making Regular Physical Activity a Habit

Barriers to Physical Activity

Activity Log – Find your starting point

Monthly Progress Tests

Weekly Exercise Plan

Exercise and Mental Health for Young People

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/young-people/exercise-and-mental-health-for-young-people>

Physical Activity – It's Important

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/physical-activity-its-important>