

Exercise: It Can Go to Your Head

by Vicki Griffin

We hear a lot about the benefits of regular exercise on physical health. But what about mental health? Your best exercise machine may be your dog. Just taking the dog for a daily walk can yield some surprising benefits—for you as well as Bowser!

Reduces Stress

- Even a single bout of exercise can be a valuable short-term therapy for reducing tension, depression, anger, and confusion.
- A ten-minute brisk walk will yield one hour of increased energy and reduced tension, whereas a sugary snack will ultimately result in fatigue and tension.
- Moderate-intensity exercise is even more beneficial than high-intensity exercise for anxiety reduction.
- Regular exercise increases the ability to handle stress by causing less stress hormone to be released when stress does occur.

Improves Mood

- Students who exercise regularly show lower levels of anxiety, shyness, loneliness, and hopelessness than their less active peers.
- Moderate, regular exercise has a positive impact on mood, vigor, psychological well-being, creativity, and self-esteem in all age groups.
- Animal studies show that regular exercise can reduce symptoms of depression and may alleviate some major depression.

Boosts Brain Power

- Exercise increases cerebral blood flow, increases neurotransmitter availability and efficiency, and affects brain structure.
- Small increases in aerobic fitness improve mental fitness, particularly executive control functions of the brain, which

have to do with planning, coordinating, and filtering out distracting information.

- Animal and human studies show that repeated physical activity triggers chemical changes in the brain that enhance learning and memory.
- Children learn better when the brain is stimulated by exercising.
- People over age 60 who walk rapidly for 45 minutes 3 times a week can significantly improve mental processing abilities that would normally decline with age.

Helps You Sleep

- Exercise can help alleviate sleep problems in older adults.
- Exercise can be effective in improving reported sleep quality, depression, strength, and quality of life.
- Treating chronic fatigue with appropriate exercise can improve sleep and mood.
- Exercising in the evening does not disturb sleep.

After Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord told Adam that he would eat by "the sweat of your face" (Genesis 3:19). What inestimable benefits were hidden in that brief directive! God knew that from the beginning and blessed us with exercise.

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