

Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

Need motivation to exercise? Consider seven ways exercise can improve your life — starting today!

Want to feel better, have more energy and perhaps even live longer? Look no further than old-fashioned exercise.

The merits of regular physical activity — from preventing chronic health conditions to promoting weight loss and better sleep — are hard to ignore. And the benefits are yours for the taking, regardless of age, sex or physical ability. Need more convincing? Check out seven specific ways exercise can improve your life.

1. Exercise improves your mood.

Need to blow off some steam after a stressful day? A workout at the gym or a brisk 30-minute walk can help you calm down.

Physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed than you were before you worked out. You'll also look better and feel better when you exercise regularly, which can boost your confidence and improve your self-esteem. Regular physical activity can even help prevent depression.

2. Exercise combats chronic diseases.

Worried about heart disease? Hoping to prevent osteoporosis? Physical activity might be the ticket.

Regular physical activity can help you prevent — or manage — high blood pressure. Your cholesterol will benefit, too. Regular physical activity boosts high-density lipoprotein (HDL), or "good," cholesterol while decreasing triglycerides. This one-two punch keeps your blood flowing smoothly by lowering the buildup of plaques in your arteries.

And there's more. Regular physical activity can help you **prevent type 2 diabetes**, osteoporosis and certain types of cancer.

3. Exercise helps you manage your weight.

Want to drop those excess pounds? Trade some couch time for walking or other physical activities.

This one's a no-brainer. When you engage in physical activity, you burn calories. The more intense the activity, the more calories you burn — and the easier it is to keep your weight under control. You don't even need to set aside major chunks of time for working out. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk during your lunch break. Do jumping

jacks during commercials. Better yet, turn off the TV and take a brisk walk. Dedicated workouts are great, but physical activity you accumulate throughout the day helps you burn calories, too.

4. Exercise boosts your energy level.

Winded by grocery shopping or household chores? Don't throw in the towel. Regular physical activity can leave you breathing easier.

Physical activity delivers oxygen and nutrients to your tissues. In fact, regular physical activity helps your entire cardiovascular system — the circulation of blood through your heart and blood vessels — work more efficiently. Big deal? You bet! When your heart and lungs work more efficiently, you'll have more energy to do the things you enjoy.

5. Exercise promotes better sleep.

Struggling to fall asleep? Or stay asleep? It might help to boost your physical activity during the day.

A good night's sleep can improve your concentration, productivity and mood. And you guessed it — physical activity is sometimes the key to better sleep. Regular physical activity can help you fall asleep faster and deepen your sleep. There's a caveat, however. If you exercise too close to bedtime, you may be too energized to fall asleep. If you're having trouble sleeping, you might want to exercise earlier in the day.

6. Exercise can put the spark back into your sex life.

Are you too tired to have sex? Or feeling too out of shape to enjoy physical intimacy? Physical activity to the rescue.

Regular physical activity can leave you feeling energized and looking better, which may have a positive effect on your sex life. But there's more to it than that. Regular physical activity can lead to enhanced arousal for women, and men who exercise regularly are less likely to have problems with erectile dysfunction than are men who don't exercise — especially as they get older.

7. Exercise can be — gasp — fun!

Wondering what to do on a Saturday afternoon? Looking for an activity that suits the entire family? Get physical!

Physical activity doesn't have to be drudgery. Take a ballroom dancing class. Check out a local climbing wall or hiking trail. Push your kids or grandkids on the swings or climb with them on the jungle gym. Plan a neighborhood soccer or touch football game, participate in the local aqua fit program. Find a physical activity you enjoy, and go for it. If you get bored, try something new. If you're moving, it counts!