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What Is Good Mental Health?



As the World Health Organization (WHO) puts it, "Mental health is an integral part of health; indeed, there is no health without mental health."

Good mental health, like good physical health, is important to human wellbeing. But what does it mean to be in a state of good mental health?

First, good mental health is more than just the absence of diagnosable mental illness. In fact, people with mental illness, just like people with physical illness, can cope with their disease or infirmity and have periods of relatively good health as they move toward recovery.

Second, good mental health goes beyond feelings of happiness and contentment. Positive emotions are wonderful to experience, but they are rarely a constant in life. People experience setbacks, challenges, and trauma over the course of their lives, and a realistic definition of good mental health needs to include the range of emotions people actually feel.

A better way to think about good mental health is as a form of emotional *resilience*. Just as a person in good physical health can be tired and have sore muscles after a period of intense physical exertion, so a person in good mental health is able to feel pain and sadness after a setback or

loss, then return to emotional stability—not right away, perhaps, but in time and with support.

People with good mental health are able to

- Appropriately express and modulate their emotions
- Empathize with others and maintain good relationships
- Give and accept emotional support
- Cope with uncertainty, adverse events, and the normal stresses of life

When you are in good mental health, you are able to appreciate the good aspects of life and feel the pain of life's disappointments and losses. Except in the worst of times, you are able to work productively, contribute to your community, and realize your potential. While people's physical health tends to get more of their attention, mental health is just as important to their wellbeing. As the World Health Organization (WHO) puts it, "Mental health is an integral part of health; indeed, there is no health without mental health."

Sources: Galderisi, S., Heinz, A., Kastrup, M., Beezhold, J. & Sartorius, N. (2015, June). Toward a new definition of mental health. *World Psychiatry*, 14(2), 231–233.

World Health Organization (WHO). (2022, 17 June). *Mental health: Strengthening our response*. Retrieved 5 January 2024 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

Morgan, H. (Reviewed 2024). *What is good mental health?* (B. Schuette & Z. Meeker, Eds.). London: Workplace Options.

Top 10 Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

1

REDUCES STRESS

Exercise increases concentrations of *norepinephrine*, which

- Moderates the brain's response to stress
- Boosts the body's ability to deal with existing physical symptoms that stress and worrying creates

2

ALLEVIATES DEPRESSION

Exercise releases *endorphins*, which create feelings of happiness and euphoria:

- Studies show that exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication.
- Endorphins promote neural growth, reduced inflammation, feelings of calmness, and wellbeing.

3

ALLEVIATES ANXIETY

Exercise is a natural and effective antianxiety treatment (as for depression, endorphins also help reduce anxiety):

- It relieves tension and stress.
- It boosts physical and mental energy.
- It enhances wellbeing.

4

REDUCES SYMPTOMS OF ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)

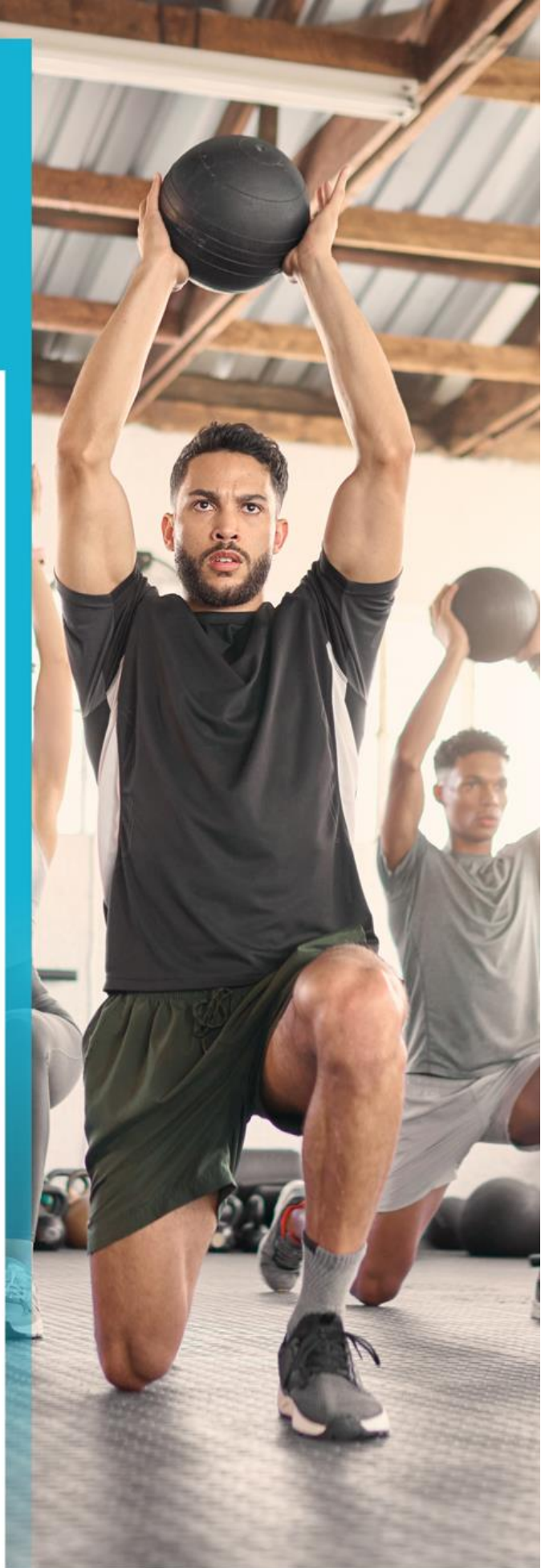
Exercise boosts the brain's *norepinephrine*, *dopamine*, and *serotonin* levels—all of which affect focus and attention—thus improving concentration, motivation, memory, and mood. Exercise works in much the same way as medication prescribed to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

5

REDUCES SYMPTOMS OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

The body focus required during exercise can help the nervous system become "unstuck" and begin to move out of the immobilization stress response. Exercises that involve cross movement and engage both arms and legs are the best choices.

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Top 10 Mental Health Benefits of Exercise (Contd.,)

6

SHAPES MEMORY AND BRAINPOWER

- Exercise stimulates the growth of new brain cells (*neurogenesis*) and helps prevent age-related decline.
- It increases levels of a *brain-derived protein (BDNF)*, which helps with decision-making, higher thinking, and learning.
- It also increases production of cells in the hippocampus.

7

SUPPORTS HIGHER SELF-ESTEEM

Investment in your mind, body, and soul fosters a

- Sense of self-worth
- Sense of empowerment
- Positive self-image
- Sense of achievement

8

IMPROVES SLEEP

Short bursts of exercise can help regulate your sleep patterns. Exercise raises the body's core temperature. The return to normal temperature post-exercise signals the body that it's time to sleep.

9

INCREASES ENERGY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Research shows that regular exercise boosts energy level and increases work productivity.

10

FOSTERS STRONGER RESILIENCE

- Exercise boosts the immune system and reduces the impact of stress. This provides a healthy coping mechanism for mental or emotional life challenges.
- Dopamine is the brain's "reward chemical," released in response to any form of pleasure.
- This dopamine release effectively distracts drug and alcohol addicts, making them deprioritize cravings (at least short-term).

Clifford, H. M. (2017, 8 February). *Top 10 mental health benefits of exercise* [PowerPoint]. Retrieved 28 March 2018 from the U.S. Navy website: <http://www.public.navy.mil>



How much exercise do I need?

It is recommended that you aim for 30 minutes of moderate exercise, five times a week (shorter sessions if necessary). This works out to 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) per week.

- You could also try doing 50 minutes three times per week, or 75 minutes two times per week.
- In addition, perform strength-training exercises at least twice per week to work all major muscle groups.

Good Eating Habits and Your Child

It will be exciting for your child to see the vegetables grow, and then have him or her gather them to bring them in for dinner.

As a parent, you need to establish good eating habits for your child. When you make a meal, give your child options from the foods you have made. It is not a requirement for every meal to have something from each food group, and it is usually more of a challenge just getting your toddler to eat at all.

As long as your toddler is not losing weight or completely refusing to eat, there is nothing to worry about. If you have strong concerns about your child's eating habits, contact your pediatrician for guidance or help.

If your child only picks at dinner, let the meal end, and clear the plates including your child's. Do not turn your dinner table into a battleground, because you will not win, and your child will learn that this is the one place he or she is in control.

Do not give attention to negative behavior. If your child is hungry after dinner, then remind them that they did not eat dinner and cannot have any snacks. This technique will encourage your toddler to think twice before refusing to eat dinner the next time.

If you are having difficulties in getting your toddler to eat fruits and vegetables, there are some tricks you can use to introduce these healthy foods into your child's diet, such as these:

- Make a vegetable dip and dip raw vegetables, like carrots and celery, into it as an appetizer. Your child will think it is

just fun to dip the carrots without realizing that they are good for them.

- Have your child help you make a pot of vegetable soup, and allow them to choose which vegetables to put in the soup.
- Have your child help you make a homemade pizza with only vegetable toppings.
- Use a cookie cutter to cut vegetables into fun shapes your child will want to eat.
- Slice up raw vegetables, and give them to your child as a snack.
- Plant a small vegetable garden in your backyard. It will be exciting for your child to see the vegetables grow, and then have them gather the ripe veggies and bring them in for dinner.
- Melt cheese, and pour it over broccoli or cauliflower to buffer the strong taste of the vegetables.

Establish rules about eating and mealtimes, and be consistent with their enforcement. No dinner means no dessert and no snacks. Eat your meals together with your child, so that your child sees that you enjoy healthier foods and so that mealtime can be a relaxed, enjoyable, and pleasant part of the day instead of a battleground.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2023). *Good eating habits for you and your child*. London: Author.



Being Mindful of Your Hunger

Without even realizing it, most people eat without much thought. When you do this, however, you tend to overeat, and you often miss the joy in eating—compelling you to eat more. The simple act of mindful eating is one way you can honor your body yet fill your soul.

Hunger-Rating Scale

Check out this hunger-rating scale:

E = Empty—You are feeling faint or sick because you are so hungry, as if you haven't eaten for days.

- 1** You are famished and seriously uncomfortable, borderline nauseous.
- 2** You are extremely hungry. Your stomach is growling. You are easily irritated and edgy.
- 3** You are physically hungry—perhaps a bit low on energy and slightly uncomfortable. It is here that you want to eat. Carry snacks and plan ahead so that you are able to honor this hunger and not surpass it and enter the "danger zone."
- 4** You believe that you feel hungry, but signs and symptoms are manageable. You often find yourself poking around the fridge. Ask yourself what it is that you really need. Maybe you are tired, bored or procrastinating something.
- 5** You feel neutral, though hunger is on the horizon.

- 6** You are comfortable and can eat with control; you could actually stop here, as the hunger pangs have subsided.
- 7** You are feeling full. Stop eating, or don't start eating yet.
- 8** You are feeling too full, because you may have had a few too many bites.
- 9** You feel uncomfortably full and bloated.

F = Holiday-overeating full—You are not hungry at all. You never want to look at food again.

Practice your mindful eating.

Using the scale above, keep track of your hunger patterns on this chart.

HUNGER PATTERNS			
Rate your hunger when you started eating.	Rate your hunger when you finished eating.	What do you remember about your meal?	Were you satisfied?

Remember to slow down. It takes at least 20 minutes for the brain to get the message that you are full, so chew well and slowly, and savour every bite.

Workplace Options Wellness Team (AWARE) & Schuette, B. (Ed.). (Reviewed 2023). *Being mindful of your hunger*. London: Author.