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The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise

HOW CAN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELP REDUCE STRESS AND ANXIETY?

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Let's better our Mental Health by being more physically active!

With time-consuming commutes, busy lives, day-to-day house jobs and family commitments being just a Whatsapp notification away, it's no wonder most of us walk around stressing about being stressed! But, with exercise being free (if we choose) and available to us all, how can we get started and, more importantly, why do our bodies and brains love it so much?

We all suffer with symptoms of stress, some of which many of us don't even realise are caused by stress! But, they can include aches and pains, tension headaches, stomach problems, irritability, sweating hands and feeling all-round down in the dumps! Sound familiar?

Well, there is a great remedy to help relieve daily stress. Not only is it natural, effective, flexible around our daily lives and even free - you can do it pretty much anywhere. Yep, you got it, we're talking about exercise, and it's nothing to be scared of!

Whether it's increasing our mood, making us feel calm, distracting us from our worries or even encouraging us to socialise - exercise really can do us the world of good in bettering our mental health. And, the term 'runners high' really does relate!

But wait - while this sounds great, our lives are very busy and often see us pulled in many different directions. Whether it's work, family or unexpected errands, it's no wonder many of us struggle to fit exercise in amongst our other commitments.

Luckily, we're here to help!



85%

of adults are experiencing stress regularly, but only

32%

of people use exercise to overcome stress

How can making regular exercise a part of our daily routines help reduce the feeling of stress and anxiety?

In this short guide, we explore how exercising regularly can benefit our mental health, and we share some valuable top tips to make it that little bit easier, and of-course, enjoyable!

References:
Forthwithlife.co.uk

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Makes us feel organised

Whether it's going for a walk, heading out for a jog or doing a spot of swimming - adding regular exercise into your daily routine can act as a great stress relief - helping us feel a greater sense of calm and enabling us to think clearer, easing tension and anxiety. And, staying committed to a consistent routine can give you structure, make you feel in control and helps a prolonged and increased feeling of wellbeing.



Encourages muscle meditation

We all know a typical symptom of stress is feeling 'up-tight', right? Well, exercising is effective in releasing that pent-up energy and muscle tension, and is a great distraction from your problems! Not only this, concentrating on repetitive muscle movements during exercise can help clean our mind of the daily stresses of life, relieving frustration, taking our mind off our worries and instead focusing on our body.



Releases 'feel good' endorphins

Engaging your body in physical activity increases its production of endorphins - chemicals that send positive, blissful signals to your brain, giving us that 'feel-good' feeling! Not only this, exercise can improve our mental health, making us feel more enthusiastic, less tense, more relaxed and generally 'able to cope'. And remember, exercising tones up our muscles and reduces weight, which gives us a natural boost of self-confidence, increases self-esteem and improves our mental satisfaction - bonus!



Improves our resiliency to stress

Research shows that those who exercise are less likely to have a stress reaction to adverse situations. Daily physical activity can contribute to your resiliency against stress, with fit people being likely to handle the effects of stress better. Not only this, exercise reduces stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, enabling us to handle stressful situations more calmly and thoroughly - exactly what we need!



Increases social interaction

By simply joining a fitness group at work, participating in a class at a local gym or even asking a friend to be your running buddy, exercising with others can encourage a routine and increase positive social interactions - great for our mental health! Not only that - exercising with others gives you the opportunity to meet like-minded people and interact with people who are probably experiencing the similar stress of modern-day life as you - so you're not alone!

References

Navacentre.com
Stresshack.com
Active.com

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So, what simple things can we do to sneak a little more exercise into our daily routine?



Do some **sit-ups, a plank, or tricep dips** on the sofa while the adverts are on the TV!



Walk up and down the stairs 10 times – because why not!



At work, **stand up every hour and walk** a lap of the office!



Whilst cooking or waiting for the microwave to ping, do some **jumping jacks or squats** on the spot!



Park the car further away than you normally would - or **hop off the bus** at an earlier stop!



Take calls **standing up** – it can even help make sound more enthusiastic, apparently!



Encourage **'walking meetings'** - a breathe of fresh air and those extra steps make all the difference!



Is someone at the door? **Walking-lunge** your way there and feel the burn!



One of the most common reasons many of us don't exercise enough is because you are 'too busy'. Well, why not **speed walk your errands?** Not only will it give you more of a workout and release those happy chemicals, but it'll also free up more of your time to do what you want - win win!



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How does exercise help you manage stress?

We'd love to hear your stories, so please do get in touch by tagging us in a Facebook or Twitter Post (**@MyPaycare**) with the hashtag **#PayCAREforyourself** or by simply emailing us on **marketing@paycare.org**



Paycare House
George Street
Wolverhampton
WV2 4DX

01902 371000

enquiries@paycare.org

www.paycare.org

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