

Move for the Mind: Physical Activity and Mental Health

Did you know physical activity can enhance your mental well-being? According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 20% of adults have experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression. Luckily, physical activity can help!

The CDC recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week, or about 20–30 minutes per day. Meeting that goal can reduce depression risk by up to 30%. Even small amounts of movement make a difference.

When you exercise, increased blood flow delivers oxygen and nutrients to your brain, triggering the release of endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine, which boosts happiness, relaxation, and sleep quality.

Boost the benefits:

- Exercise outdoors in a park, garden, or trail to boost mood and lower stress.
- Get active with others. Walking with a friend or joining a group class helps build connection and accountability.

Getting started: Begin small. Even a 10-minute walk can make a difference. Find an activity you enjoy and invite a friend to join you!

Read more: go.illinois.edu/move4themind.

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness in their lifetime. Daily routines can become healthy habits that support mental well-being. Try building simple habits into your day:

- Start your morning with a glass of water (add lemon if you like).
- Get about 30 minutes of exercise to boost circulation and energy.
- Eat a balanced breakfast with protein to fuel your body.
- Stay hydrated throughout the day to help with concentration and mood.
- Connect with others by phone or in person. Social interaction can reduce depression risk.
- Practice gratitude or do something kind for someone.
- Prioritize your tasks by making a list.
- Take short breaks to relax or reflect.
- Before bed, write down tasks for the next day to clear your mind.

Healthy routines can make a real difference in your mental health.

TANGY VEGETABLE PASTA SALAD

Servings: 6

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cooked pasta, such as rotini
- ¼ cup vinegar, such as white or red wine
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ⅛ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ medium cucumber, chopped
- ½ medium carrot, chopped
- ½ medium tomato, chopped
- ¼ whole green pepper, chopped
- ½ cup broccoli florets, chopped
- ½ cup radishes, thinly sliced

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Gently rub produce under cool running water.
3. In a small saucepan, combine vinegar, sugar, garlic powder, and black pepper. Stir and heat over medium heat until the sugar dissolves. Do not boil. Remove from heat and set aside.
4. Combine vegetables in a large bowl. Add cooked pasta and vinegar mixture; stir gently to combine.
5. Cover and refrigerate overnight or at least 4 hours before serving.

Note: Adapted from the recipe “Tangy Crisp Vegetable and Pasta Salad,” from USDA What’s Cooking.

Nutrition information per serving: 60 calories; 0 g total fat; 60 mg sodium; 12 g carbohydrate; 1 g dietary fiber; 2 g protein.

