

One of the easiest and most effective ways to give your mental health a boost is to go for a walk. Walking has obvious physical benefits, and it has mental health benefits, too.

Among other things, it can boost your mood, strengthen social connections, improve focus and creativity, create space for mindfulness and reflection, and, most importantly, reduce stress. Here are some key takeaways:

1. Walking can trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural mood elevators. Just a brisk 30-minute walk can help alleviate feelings of anxiety and depression, leaving you feeling more positive and energized.
2. Our fast-paced society can limit time for community, but walking helps connect us with others. It's often not as vigorous as other physical activities, which creates opportunities for conversation and connection.
3. Walking can enhance the flow of blood to the brain, which helps to release hormones that promote

the growth of new neurons that help problem-solving, memory, and reasoning. That can help limit cognitive decline as we age.

4. Often, mental health providers will give a homework assignment on exercise and grounding to manage emotions, trauma, or other stressors. This exercise encourages the mind to connect with the body through breath work, with a focus on the present moment and surroundings while detaching from the past. These activities promote the production of serotonin (a precursor to the sleep hormone melatonin), creating an environment conducive to peaceful sleep.

5. Going on a nature walk can reduce levels of cortisol, which is the stress hormone that needs to be balanced to regulate several bodily functions.

Take time out from your busy day with a realistic goal of five to 10

minutes of walking at a steady pace to start, perhaps gradually increasing your walks over time. Find easily accessible places where you enjoy walking, and alternate your pace to boost calories burned and build muscle. You can take along your smartphone or other devices to listen to music, audiobooks, or podcasts.

Walking with a co-worker, family member, or friend can give you some company and keep you accountable for your routine. Tracking your progress can provide insight before and after your walks to gain a better understanding of the positive benefits of walking for your mental health. Taking these small steps can enhance your mental health, deepen relationships with others, decrease your stress at home or work, and promote your overall health.

So don't wait to get walking. Take your first steps today.

WALKING BOOSTS BOTH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

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