

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

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The Power of Self-care

Self-care is the practice of intentionally engaging in activities that positively impact mental, physical and emotional well-being. It directly correlates to mental health, as self-care techniques can help create healthy coping mechanisms for unavoidable stressors in everyday life. Practicing these techniques can soothe negative symptoms of mental conditions or help you relax.

Not everyone engages in self-care the same way. Having self-awareness when practicing self-care for mental health can help you recognize when you're experiencing certain emotions or worsened symptoms of a mental condition. Once you know your common triggers and symptoms, you can find the best techniques to care for yourself. Here are some self-care ideas to practice:

- Eat a balanced diet and stay hydrated. The foods and drinks you consume impact your mood and fuel your body with the nutrients it needs.
- Prioritize movement. Doing an activity outside is even better, as spending time in nature can boost your mental health.

- Practice healthy sleep habits (e.g., stick to a schedule, get enough sleep and avoid devices before bedtime) and make time to rest and recharge.
- Prioritize activities you enjoy, such as listening to music, reading, spending time in nature and engaging in hobbies.
- Find ways to relax, such as meditating, doing yoga, trying breathing exercises or journaling.
- Set self-care goals and priorities to help you better understand what triggers certain symptoms and what coping mechanisms work best for managing your mental health.

Self-care looks different for every person since it involves activities you enjoy or need. A simple goal is to try to do something you enjoy every day. Self-care is not a cure for mental conditions, but it can help you understand what best manages your mental health. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if you have concerns.

Best Exercises for Treating Depression

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that depression affects about 16 million adults annually. With early treatment from a medical professional, people can gain control of their symptoms and feel better. In fact, depression is one of the most treatable mental health conditions. While many people benefit from talk therapy or medication, emerging evidence shows that exercise may also help manage or improve symptoms.

A new study published in The BMJ, a peer-reviewed medical journal, found that exercise is an effective treatment option for depression either independently or when combined with therapy and medications. The research studied various exercises, including walking, jogging, yoga, strength training, mixed aerobic exercises, tai chi and qigong. The study found that while low-intensity exercise is helpful, more vigorous activity brings even greater benefits.

Although the differences in effectiveness among all the exercise regimens were marginal, here are the study's top exercises:

- Yoga
- Walking or jogging

- Strength training

The study found that yoga reduced depression the most compared to other forms of exercise studied. Also, walking or jogging were effective for both men and women. While younger people and women reaped the most benefits from strength training, yoga was more effective for men and older adults. Furthermore, yoga and strength training were especially well-tolerated by study participants, meaning the exercise could be done without experiencing significant discomfort or pain.

Although exercise has long been recommended for people experiencing depression, there aren't many guidelines on how to exercise effectively. If you're getting started with exercise, doctors recommend focusing on a form you enjoy the most rather than prioritizing one type of exercise as the "best." Vary your workout types; you may be surprised to find something different from your usual routine.

Talk to your doctor if you wonder how exercise fits into your treatment plan.