

# 5 Mental Benefits of Exercise

From less stress to a boost in self-esteem, exercise is as great for your brain as it is for your body.

Dr. Shawna Charles, who received a PhD in Psychology from Walden University, put her love of psychology into action by [opening a Los Angeles boxing gym](#) to provide people with the help they need, including fitness, an ear to listen to their problems, and a connection to vital social services. Dr. Charles, like many others in her field, understands the connection between good physical and mental health.

## The Psychological Benefits of Exercise

Most of us know the many physical benefits of exercise: weight control, lower blood pressure, reduced risk of diabetes, and increased energy, just to name a few. But what about the psychological benefits of exercise? From easing symptoms of depression and anxiety to keeping your memory sharp, there's no shortage of mental benefits of exercise. Whether you need motivation to get to the gym or to just take a brisk walk, the five psychological benefits of physical activity below will have you tying up your shoelaces and heading out the door.

### 1. **Help for depression and anxiety**

Exercise is a scientifically proven mood booster, decreasing symptoms of both depression and anxiety. Physical activity kicks up endorphin levels, the body's famous "feel good" chemical produced by the brain and spinal cord that produces feelings of happiness and euphoria. Even just moderate exercise throughout the week can improve depression and anxiety, so much so that some doctors recommend trying out an exercise regimen for these conditions before turning to medication.

### 2. **Decreased stress**

Another mental benefit of exercise is reduced stress levels—something that can make us all happier. Increasing your heart rate can reverse stress-induced brain damage by stimulating the production of neurohormones like norepinephrine, which not only improve cognition and mood but improve thinking clouded by stressful events. Exercise also forces the body's central and sympathetic nervous systems to

communicate with one another, improving the body's overall ability to respond to stress.

**3. Increased self-esteem and self-confidence**

From improving endurance to losing weight and increasing muscle tone, there's no shortage of physical achievements that come about from regular exercise. All those achievements can all add up to a whopping boost of self-esteem—and the confidence that comes with it. You may not set out for better-fitting clothes, a slimmer physique, and the ability to climb a hill without getting winded. Oftentimes it happens before you even realize it. It's just one of the many benefits of physical activity that boosts your body, mind, and spirit.

**4. Better sleep**

If you have trouble getting a good night's sleep, exercise can help with that, too. Physical activity increases body temperature, which can have calming effects on the mind, leading to less sheep counting and more shuteye. Exercise also helps regulate your circadian rhythm, our bodies' built-in alarm clock that controls when we feel tired and when we feel alert. (Although improved sleep is a psychological benefit of exercise, sleep experts recommend not exercising close to bedtime.)

**5. Brain boost**

From building intelligence to strengthening memory, exercise boosts brainpower in several ways. Studies on mice and humans indicate that cardiovascular exercise creates new brain cells—a process called neurogenesis—and improves overall brain performance. It also prevents cognitive decline and memory loss by strengthening the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning. Studies also prove that physical activity boosts creativity and mental energy. So, if you're in need of inspiration, your big idea could be just a walk or jog away.