

Lifestyle Tips



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Outdoor activity. A prescription for better mental health.



Could taking a walk outside be part of a prescription to improve your mental health? Research indicates

that improved mental, social, and physical health are all associated with perceived access to parks, bicycle or walking paths, and presence of greenery and pleasant natural features (Sugiyama et al., 2008).

In fact, the role of physical activity

in improving overall emotional health is critical, with many studies showing significant improvements in disorders such as anxiety and depression (Strohle, 2009). The mind-altering power of physical activity can also improve sleep (who couldn't use



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a better night's sleep?), elevated mood, better self-esteem, enhanced physical self-perception, and is effective at reducing and preventing stress. (Asztalos et al. 2010)

The key message here is to get outside and get active! No matter what time of day it is or what the weather is outside, you can get active and enjoy the mood-enhancing benefits of the greenery around you.

1. Becoming more active can be as simple as adding an after-dinner or weekend walk to your routine.
2. One of the easiest ways to get active outside is to walk, bike, or rollerblade to your destination. In some studies, walking was shown to be just as beneficial to mental health as more vigorous pursuits.
3. Feeling sluggish at work from being stuck inside all day? Spend some time outdoors during your lunch-time. Whether you go for a walk around the block with your co-workers or join a running team, getting outside can be fun and improve how you feel.
4. Try a new sport outdoors and get the whole family involved. Give baseball, swimming, and tennis a try in the warmer months and try snowshoeing or skiing in the winter months. You can also ease into an outdoor yoga or pilates class and enjoy the serene environments as you stretch and meditate your way to health.
5. Unstructured outdoor activities can also be a great way to get fit and get outside. Taking the dog for a walk, hiking in the park, or biking after dinner are all great ways to enjoy some greenery around you while staying active.
6. For those who are a little more adventurous, there are many ways to take in the wilderness. Whether camping or backpacking, canoeing and hiking, these nature-based activities offer the benefits of being in the beautiful outdoors while staying physically active.
7. Join an "outdoor gym". Imagine getting fit by helping to conserve the landscape (usually in a country

park or wildlife sanctuary) by making paths, hedging or planting trees, and other tasks involving carrying, walking, and digging. The activities change with the seasons and as you work, you learn about biodiversity, habitat, and the history of the landscape or species you're helping to conserve.

8. Join a fitness bootcamp and get your butt kicked outdoors! If you like being pushed to achieve your best, look for army vets teaching fitness sessions in city parks. In addition to push-ups, instructors include team-building games such as tug of war and participants are graded by ability, with fitness-focused, weight-loss, and team-building options.

However you decide to spend your time, getting active outdoors can be beneficial to your mental health just as it is to your physical health. So go ahead and take advantage of the great outdoors in places like community parks and bicycle or walking paths. Both your body and your mind will thank you.

