

Movement Matters

for Mental Well-being



Movement matters. Most people understand how physical movement moves any living creature toward better health, better physical performance and longevity. They understand that movement is the secret sauce for disease prevention and health promotion. The American Medical Association agrees that “Exercise is Medicine.” However, many may not realize the innate connection between physical health, mental health and mental well-being.

According to John W. Brick Mental Health Foundation’s Move Your Mental Health Report™, a collation and meta-analysis of 30 years’ worth of scientific research studies, there is compelling evidence that exercise and physical activity benefit mental health. Eighty-nine percent of all published peer-reviewed research found a positive, statistically significant relationship between exercise/physical activity and mental health and mental well-being.

Let’s dive deeper.

According to the findings of the Move Your Mental Health Report, three to five 30-45-minute bouts of moderate to vigorous exercise sessions per week appear to deliver the best results for optimal mental health benefits. High intensity exercise regimens are generally more effective than low-intensity regimens.

What are the best ways to determine moderate to vigorous intensity exercise or movement? Here are a few examples:

- **The talk test.** If a person is engaged in exercise and can sing a song, the intensity is most likely very light. If the person can speak with normal cadence while breathing and exercising, the intensity is moderate. Lastly, if the person is challenged to talk and move at the same time, the intensity is vigorous. The goal is to tax the person to their personal level of moderate to vigorous intensity without causing pain, discomfort or shortness of breath.

- **RPE, or Rate of Perceived Exertion.** When a person is engaged in physical activity, ask him/her on a scale of 1-10 how he/she perceives his/her level of exertion. This is the modified Borg Scale; 2 is light activity, 6 is hard breathing, 10 is extremely vigorous or maximum effort that cannot be sustained for a long period of time. It is great practice for us to help our members become more aware of their own body and how they “feel” while they are exercising. Breath rate, heart rate, how much they are sweating and how their muscles feel all contribute to RPE.

- **Heart rate monitoring.** Monitoring the heart rate is a great way to help assess intensity levels and how your heart responds to exercise.

- **The Traditional formula:** 60-80% of maximum heart rate, or MHR (220-age)
- **The Karvonen formula** is more complicated in that it calculates the person’s resting heart rate in the formula:

Resting Heart Rate (RHR) + Heart Rate Reserve (HRR) X intensity percentage. Here are the steps to calculate:

- Obtain RHR by measuring in the morning before getting out of bed.
- Obtain MHR = 220-minus age.
- Calculate HRR. $HRR = MHR - RHR$.
- Target heart rate = $RHR + HRR \times 60\%$ OR $RHR + HRR \times 80\%$
- A link to the Karvonen formula and heart rate training zones is found in the resources.
- Use a wearable device such as a watch or chest monitor for accurate heart rate monitoring during exercise.

Additionally, here are a few more tips to help movement move mental health:

- Combining or alternating strength/resistance training with cardiovascular/aerobic exercise shows stronger benefits on mental health outcomes than either one alone.
- Mindfulness-based activities like yoga and tai chi, though they can be lower intensity forms of movement, deliver more mental health benefits than walking.
- Start with one-on-one (trainer to member) then transition into a group setting. This can help build confidence and exercise adherence for consistency. Plus, exercising with a friend or in a group enhances connectivity.
- Physical and mental health have a bi-directional relationship and are linked due to biological (based on hormonal response), psychological and social mechanisms.

Movement provides several mental health and well-being benefits:

- **Boosts your mood.** Movement forces the secretion of neurotransmitters, or “happy hormones,” serotonin, dopamine and endorphins, which also help to reduce stress.

- **Improves sleep,** which helps the body to rest and recover to improve mental clarity and emotional stability. This is especially important for teens.

- **Reduces stress and anxiety** by lowering adrenaline and cortisol levels. (FYI, chronically elevated cortisol causes high levels of intra-abdominal fat deposits, which can be linked to diabetes, cancer and heart disease.)

- **Reduces depression** and can reduce the need for increased medication dosages. According to Dr. George Everly of Johns Hopkins Department of Psychiatry, one vigorous exercise bout is the equivalent to an entry level dose of Zoloft.

- **Activates the “rest and digest” parasympathetic**



by Lynne Brick

nervous system, which calms the mind and body.

- **Improves cognitive function** by enhancing mental focus, learning and memory due to increased blood circulation to the brain, which can also help prevent dementia and Alzheimer's.
- **Helps enhance self-esteem by building confidence.**
- **Builds physical and emotional resilience and coping skills.**

What is the best exercise or movement to recommend to help gain mental well-being benefits? **The best exercise is any exercise that a person likes to do.** This will ensure long-term consistency and compliance.

Here are some other activities that anyone can do almost anywhere to boost mental well-being:

- **Start each day with 5-10 minutes of morning stretch and deep breathing.** Roll your shoulders back, do spine rotations, cat-cow stretches, forward fold or happy baby pose.
- **Take a brisk walk.** Ideally walk in the forest (shinrin yoku or forest bathing) or walk along the beach. Ten minutes, three times a day is equivalent to 30 minutes of non-stop physical activity.
- **Take a break every hour** to get up and move away from your desk or computer. Hold stand-up or walking meetings.
- **Yin activities, or mindful movement practices**, such as yoga, tai chi or qigong increase mindfulness and connect your mind and body to your breath.
- **Everyday movement choices matter.** Park your car farther away. Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator. Remember and relive the activities you did as a child.
- **Daily activities matter.** Washing your car, household chores, doing the dishes or dancing "like no one is watching" all help move your mental well-being.

Resources:

<https://www.mentalwellbeingassociation.org/>
(For information re: The Mental Wellbeing Certification for Fitness Professionals)

<https://www.johnwbrickfoundation.org/>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/17450-rated-perceived-exertion-rpe-scale>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/-/scassets/files/org/heart/patient-education/hvti-files/your-pulse-and-target-heart-rate.pdf>

<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/exercise-heart-rate-zones-explained>

• **Laugh.** Unconditional laughter releases the "happy hormones:" dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins. And remember, whether it is fake laughter or real laughter, your body secretes the same "happy hormones." Laughter is the best medicine.

By the way, these mental well-being tips can benefit you and your staff as well as your members and guests. All movements matter to help move "matter" toward better physical and mental health and well-being. Exercise IS medicine. ⚙️

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