

Spring is here, kick your mental health into gear!



Most Canadians spend a lot of time in front of screens, but spring can give us the motivation to unplug, get outside and be active.

Unplug: Blue screens on electronic devices can warp our sense of time, affect our sleep and confuse our circadian rhythms. Closing your phones and tablets well before bedtime, and getting some bright sunshine in the morning, can help you reset. Going to bed at the same time every night and waking up at the same time in the morning can also help your body rebalance. It's harder to get into top gear if we haven't slept well.

Get outside: According to University of Minnesota's Taking Charge of your Health & Wellbeing, "Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings" and reduces production of stress hormones. How do you like to enjoy nature? – Sitting under your favourite tree? Walking in a local green space? Hiking on one of Manitoba's many trails? Spending time at the beach? Or maybe playing in your own garden space?

Be Active: If you've been hibernating over winter, spring is a time you can renew an active lifestyle. Moving our muscles in an activity like brisk walking raises our heart beats and helps us become more physically fit.

Being active gives our brains a boost too. When we're active, our brains produce more of our natural "feel good" chemicals and help create a sense of calm. Physical activity also increases the amount of "brain-derived neurotrophic factor" (BDNF) our brains make. BDNF has been nicknamed "fertilizer for our brains," promoting growth and function, improving learning, memory, skills and mood. According to Exercise Right, we can increase our BDNF "fertilizer" by increasing our physical activity especially with "exercise that challenges your balance or thinking, like rock climbing or dancing."

Pleasurable activities can also raise the levels of our feel-good hormones. AND if you like what you're doing, you're more likely to do more of it, more often. So, choose something you like.

How much is enough? You can find full information about the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines in the “Sources” section below. Current guidelines include about 30 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous activities. People who wear fitness trackers often have a goal of reaching 10 000 steps per day. If these goals seem overwhelming, don’t let it deter you from a smaller goal.

These are honourable goals to work toward, but you need to start where you are. Even if you add 500 steps to your routine, you’ll be improving your outlook and reducing your risk for chronic disease. After several days of 500 extra steps, you might be able to turn that into 700 steps and so on.

When we make and meet a few smaller goals, we gain a sense of accomplishment and feel successful. These positive feelings can lead to increased self-confidence and motivation, which in turn, leads to feeling good about doing more.

If getting out and getting active is new for you, check in with your health care provider the next time you visit. Most providers would likely agree that being physically active is better than not being physically active; however, they may have suggestions on how you should start.

Remember to pace yourself. If you’re new at it or have a chronic condition, it might be better to walk a minute and rest, walk a minute and rest; instead of walking for 15 minutes straight, but being too tired to do anything for the rest of the day.

Additional tips:

Short on time? Walking with a friend allows you to multitask your social life and activity. Outdoor coffee breaks and walking meetings might be a chance to pick up steps throughout the day. We’ve all thought about it, but spring might actually be the time to park a little further from the store or office to pick up a few extra steps.

Hydration. As we become more active in warmer weather, you’ll want to remember to stay hydrated. If water isn’t your favourite drink yet, why not try adding some berries or cucumber to your water and enjoy the fresh flavour?

Mindfulness. Remember to be mindful while you’re active outdoors. Let go of life’s stresses for a while. Allow yourself to be in the present, nonjudgmental, aware, and open to life’s little moments. While enjoying the outdoors, why not include all your senses: looking at types of leaves, dipping your toes or fingers in a creek or a puddle, smelling the damp soil, feeling the energy of the sun or a breeze on your body, listening to the rustle of the trees or nearby birds. Sometimes it’s the little moments that make our day brighter.

For many of us, spring comes with uplifting energy and it’s easy to get going. If this isn’t you, take time to get to know what you’re feeling. Ask for help, if needed.

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Sources:

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- Screen Time. ParticipAction. <https://www.participaction.com/category/screen-time/>
- Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing: How Does Nature Impact Our Wellbeing? University of Minnesota. <https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>
- Brain Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF) and exercise. Exercise Right. <https://exerciseright.com.au/brain-derived-neurotrophic-factor-bdnf-and-exercise/>
- Make Your Whole Day Matter. Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults aged 18-64 years. Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. <https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/adults-18-64/>
- For older adults, every 500 additional steps taken daily associated with lower heart risk. Science Daily. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2023/03/230303105410.htm>
- Physical activity is medicine: Prescribe it. Therapeutics Initiative, University of British Columbia. <https://www.ti.ubc.ca/2022/07/13/137-physical-activity-is-medicine-prescribe-it/>

Additional Resources

- 23 and 1/2 hours. Dr. Mike Evans. 9-minute video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUalnS6HIGo>
- Screen-Free Week is May 1-7, 2023! Sponsored by Fairplayforkids.org. <https://www.screenfree.org/>
- Get Outdoors. Get Inspired. Trails Manitoba. <https://www.trailsmanitoba.ca/>
- Walking Workout. Walking Your Way to Health. Manitoba In Motion. https://www.gov.mb.ca/mh/activeliving/tools_resources/walking/walking_your_way_to_health_in_motion.pdf
- Spring Cleaning for Your Mental Health. CAMH. <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/spring-cleaning-for-your-mental-health>
- Time magazine: 'Forest Bathing' Is Great for Your Health. Here's How to Do It. <https://time.com/5259602/japanese-forest-bathing/>
- 7 Benefits of Spending Time in Nature. McMaster University. Student Wellness Centre. <https://wellness.mcmaster.ca/7-benefits-of-spending-time-in-nature/>
- Exercise Is Medicine® Canada. <https://exerciseismedicine.org/canada/>

**Why not take 9 minutes to watch this video?
It might change the way you think about physical activity.**

