

## Exercise & Mental Wellness

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to support both your physical and mental health. When you feel ready to make positive changes, moving your body is a simple and powerful place to start. Talk with your health care provider about how regular exercise can support your mental well-being.

### Can exercise really help?

Physical activity can make a real difference for people living with depression or other mental health conditions. Regular movement may:

- Boost self-esteem
- Improve sleep quality
- Provide a healthy distraction from negative thoughts
- Reduce the intensity of depressive symptoms
- Reduce stress by helping your body use up extra adrenaline
- Trigger the release of endorphins (natural chemicals that relax the body)

### Finding motivation

When you're struggling with low energy or mood, finding motivation can be hard. It helps to remember that exercise offers both short-term and lasting benefits:

- **Right away:** It can lift your mood and ease symptoms of depression.
- **Over time:** You'll build strength, increase energy, and may notice weight or muscle changes.

Aerobic activities (the kind that raise your heart rate) often have the greatest impact on mood, but strength and conditioning exercises can help too. **The key is to move in ways you enjoy.**

## Getting started

1. **Talk with your health care provider** before starting any new exercise routine.
2. **Choose something you like.** Whether it's walking, swimming, or dancing, the best activity is the one you'll keep doing.
3. **Start small.** The American Heart Association suggests 30 minutes of physical activity a day, five days a week — but even 10-minute sessions are beneficial.
4. **Create a routine.** Add exercise to your daily schedule so it becomes a regular part of your routine.
5. **Build up gradually.** Increase time and intensity as you feel stronger.
6. **Track your progress.** Keeping a simple log helps you see your effort, stay motivated, and notice how exercise affects your mood over time.

**Remember:** It's normal to have rest days. Be kind to yourself and remember that **every bit of movement matters.**

**For more mental health educational resources, visit [depressioncenter.org/toolkit](https://depressioncenter.org/toolkit).**

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This document provides general educational information developed by the Eisenberg Family Depression Center. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Please consult your health care provider if you have questions about your health or treatment options.