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This article is all about the third foundational element of good mental health ... exercise. Exercise definitely impacts our mental health, for the good. Read below to find out how.

And don't forget, our last article was about nutrition (the second foundational element of good mental health) ... and how eating well can positively impact our mental health. [Click here](#) to find out more!

Exercise and Mental Health ... Get Moving and Notice the Benefits!

**By Amanda Pulford
Director and Clinical Psychologist
(BPsych Hons, MPsych Clin)**

Exercise! For some it's a dirty word, for others it's a way of life. But did you know that exercise is not only beneficial for your physical health, it's beneficial for your mental health too. Regular exercise can have an extremely positive impact on posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, ADHD, and more. Exercise also relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and improves your overall mood. It can also boost your self-esteem, and build resilience. And you don't have to be a gym junkie. Read on to find out more about the mental health benefits of exercise.

If you're interested in our previous articles, please click [here](#)

If you've got a suggestion for an article, or there's something more you would like to hear about, please send us an email by clicking [here](#)

AWAKEN PSYCHOLOGY

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118 Partridge Street
Glenelg South SA 5045

e : amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au
w : www.awakenpsychology.com.au
fb : www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology
t : www.tumblr.com/blog/awakenpsychology

p : 0488 954 195
f : 08 8294 3100

PTSD and Trauma : Evidence suggests that by really focusing on your body and how it feels as you exercise, you can actually help your nervous system become 'unstuck' and begin to move out of the fight-flight-freeze stress response that typifies Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and trauma. Instead of letting your mind wander off and think about other things, pay close attention to the physical sensations in your joints and muscles, even your internal sensations. Exercises that involve cross movement that engage both arms and legs – such as walking (especially in sand), running, swimming, weight training, or dancing – are some of the best exercises. Outdoor activities such as hiking, sailing, riding, and rock climbing have also been shown to reduce the symptoms of PTSD.

Depression : Studies show that exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication (but without the side effects). In addition to relieving depression symptoms, research also shows that maintaining a regular pattern of exercise can prevent relapse. Exercise promotes brain changes – from neural growth, to reduced inflammation, and new patterns that promote feelings of calm and well-being. Exercise also releases endorphins and serotonin – those 'feel good' chemicals. And finally, exercise can also distract us away from the cycle of negative thoughts that feed depression.

Anxiety : Exercise is a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. It relieves tension and stress, boosts your physical and mental energy, and releases endorphins. However, try to pay attention when you're exercising, rather than zoning out. Notice the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, or the rhythm of your breathing. By adding 'mindfulness' to your exercise, you may be able to interrupt the flow of constant worries that typifies anxiety.

ADHD : Exercising regularly is one of the easiest and most effective ways to improve concentration, motivation, memory, and mood, and in turn reduce the symptoms of ADHD. Physical activity immediately boosts specific brain chemicals that help improve focus and attention.

But how much exercise do you need? It's probably not as much as you think. You can gain all the physical and mental health benefits of exercise with 30-minutes of moderate exercise five times a week. Two 15-minute or even three 10-minute exercise sessions a day can also work just as well.

However, if that seems overwhelming, then don't despair. Even just a few minutes of physical activity are better than none at all. Start with 5 or 10-minute sessions and slowly increase your time, or how often you do them. The more you exercise, the more energy you'll have, so eventually you'll feel ready for a little more.

The key is ... committing to doing some moderate physical activity on most days. This is the best way to build a beneficial exercise habit. If you're struggling to find motivation, or struggling to stay motivated – think about ways you can make exercise part of your daily routine and lifestyle, choose something you'll enjoy, and maybe ask family or friends to help motivate you.

If you find it difficult to build a regular exercise routine and feel like your mental health is being affected, please feel free to contact us on amanda@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)

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