

MIND GAMES

Being active promotes more activity just as inactivity breeds inactivity. It's a feeling most of us recognise after sitting watching television and then trying to 'get going'. Our levels of energy are often a reflection of our mental state and the circle of inactivity can be difficult to break. Often we are sedentary because we feel negative, either about ourselves or an aspect of our lives. These negative feelings increase because we are sedentary and so the cycle continues.

Most of us know that regular exercise is about staying fit, keeping to a healthy weight and preventing illness. Regular exercise also means feeling more positive, happier and confident. Exercise has significant psychological benefits and being physically active gives your mental health a boost. If you have ever attended a cardiac rehabilitation class you will know they are a testimony to the psychological benefits of exercise.

Clinical research is increasingly reporting on a beneficial relationship between exercise and mental wellbeing and though these findings are being well documented, they aren't a new phenomena. In the 1960s and '70s, before the use of anti-depressants,

Have you ever noticed that the less you do the less you want to do? Martin Feaver looks at ways to get your mind and body moving

exercise, especially vigorous walking, was a regular element in the treatment of illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

Physical activity alters the chemistry of the brain by increasing the production of certain chemicals – serotonin, dopamine and endorphins are a few you may recognise. They effect a whole range of the body's functions including our sleep and waking patterns, libido, appetite, mood and pain. Exercise can reduce anger, decrease stress and tension, and help us to relax – it has been called the natural anti-depressant.

The positive cycle continues, by taking

regular exercise we are increasing our chances of having a good night's sleep which in turn, means we face the next day feeling energised and positive. Not only does regular exercise help us cope with the present, it can prevent us developing low moods and poor energy levels or reduce the intensity of mood swings and drops in energy levels.

As we go through our lives our circumstances change. We might develop health problems, change jobs or retire and each event brings with it a variety of demands that can challenge us and cause

THREE TO TRY:

Improve your flexibility and balance with these exercises. Remember, if you do not exercise regularly, check with your GP before starting an exercise programme. Always stop exercising if you feel dizzy, unwell or if there is any pain.

BACK OF THE LEG STRETCHES

If seated, ensure the chair is secure. Stretch the left leg in front with toes pulled towards you, and rest your hands on the knee of the bent leg. Lean forwards with a straight back and keep looking ahead. Hold for 15 seconds breathing throughout. Repeat on the right leg. If standing, shift your weight onto your left leg and follow the same process.



TIPTOE WALKING

Walk forwards on your tip toes keeping your legs as straight as possible and look forwards. Try doing ten steps and gradually increase the number. To begin with you may find you need a wall to assist you. For an extra challenge try walking backwards.



CHAIR TURNS

Sitting on a chair that will not move, clasp your hands together and put your feet out in front of you hip width apart. Breathe in as you turn gently to the left, hold for one second and then return to the centre, breathing out. Make sure your knees stay facing forwards. Then repeat to the right.



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- Improved appetite
- Improved sleep pattern
- Increased libido
- Increased energy
- Increased mental alertness
- Alleviation of mild depression
- Increased confidence
- Increased self esteem
- Feeling more relaxed
- Reduced stress levels
- Reduced anxiety
- Reduced pain sensations
- Reduced levels of anger
- Reduced tension

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anxiety. Being physically active can help us cope with these changes more easily, enabling us to overcome our fears and confidently meet the demands of change.

Taking the first step is the hardest part but it can make all the difference. So when you find yourself struggling to exercise try this simple technique: stand up. Ready? Step onto your right foot. Then move your left foot in front of your right foot. Then keep going, and that's all there is to it – you are on your way!