



Taking steps together to promote mental well-being.

Exercise and Mental Well-Being

Exercise is a powerful tool for managing mental health for several reasons. Most importantly, it promotes all kinds of changes in the brain, including neural growth, reduced inflammation, and new activity patterns that promote feelings of calm and well-being. It also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals in your brain that energize your spirits and make you feel good. Finally, exercise can also serve as a distraction, allowing you to find some quiet time to manage stress.

Nature and Mental Well-Being

Research has found that spending time in nature has cognitive benefits and is associated with increases in happiness, subjective well-being, positive affect, positive social interactions and a sense of meaning and purpose in life, as well as decreases in mental distress.

Social Connections and Mental Well-Being

Human beings are inherently social creatures. As far back as we can trace, people have traveled, hunted and thrived in social groups. Humans who were separated from their tribe often suffered severe consequences. Social groups provide us with an important part of our identity, and more than that, they teach us a set of skills that help us prosper in a complex environment. Feeling socially connected, especially in an increasingly isolated world, is more important than ever. Among other positive effects, social connections

- Improve quality of life
- Boost mental health
- Help you live longer

Why Green Exercise?

When studying the impact of green exercise on mental health, researchers tend to focus on changes in self-esteem and mood as they can serve as short- and long-term indicators of mental health. Within the first five minutes of participating in green exercise, we experience the greatest improvements in our mood and self-esteem. These changes tend to last for about 2-4 hours following exercise and although short-lived, can result in engaging in healthier behaviors, more social interaction, and increased productivity. This rapid boost is believed to be driven by the transition to a green environment, and the way **nature helps us switch from voluntary attention**, which requires focus and energy, **to involuntary attention**, which requires minimal effort, allowing us to recover from mental fatigue. “Exposure to nature is really good at facilitating those changes very quickly.”

So, something as easy as a quick 5 to 10-minute walk on a trail nearby could be just what you need to get through that long, stressful day.



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What does the research say?

- ❖ There's a growing body of evidence linking green exercise to improved mental health and well-being. Improvements include: reduced stress; improved mood and self esteem; and reduced social isolation, anxiety and vulnerability to depression
 - ❖ Exercise and nature exposure are increasingly being recommended by health professionals as part of prevention, early intervention and treatment plans for depression and anxiety.
 - ❖ The international research is strong enough that researchers are calling for nature and "green exercise" to be considered mainstream treatment options, and recognized as integral to public health
 - ❖ PaRx officially launched in Ontario in February 2021 with support from health partners such as the Ontario College of Family Physicians, Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario and Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario
 - ❖ Nature prescriptions were named one of the top eight global wellness trends in 2019, and are being implemented around the world.
 - ❖ The University of Essex leads the way in researching the health benefits of green exercise. Their 2019 study analyzed data from nearly 20,000 people and found that those who spent at least 2 hours/week engaged in green recreation reported greater health & psychological well-being
 - ❖ A 2020 study by Essex's Green Exercise Research Team followed 1,252 participants engaged in activities like walking, and found that when it came to self-esteem and mood, the biggest improvements came in the first five minutes of exposure to nature.
 - ❖ A 2010 University of Essex-led meta-analysis of 10 studies found that green exercise was associated with statistically significant improvements in self-esteem and mood;
 - ❖ In a 2019 study of 20,000 people, a team led by the European Centre for Environment & Human Health found that people who spent two hours a week in green spaces were substantially more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who don't
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What does it mean to be a Workplace Wellness Champion?

- ❖ Encouraging your team to prioritize walks in nature
 - ❖ Fostering a sense of community through regular communication and creating shared goals for the team
 - ❖ Providing gentle encouragement and positive feedback
 - ❖ Meeting the group where they are at and not pushing the pace to go faster or do more - leave them wanting more.
 - ❖ Helping to overcome obstacles
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Tips for leading groups:

- ❖ Start off each walk with a “check in”, including a welcome and the plan for that walk. Be sure to acknowledge that they have shown up and have prioritized their well-being.
 - ❖ Set clear expectations - timing, route, pace. Encourage the group to do what feels right for them (ie. they joined the the group for accountability but want to do their own thing)
 - ❖ Take time to “just be”, no need to force conversation, be mindful of surroundings - engage your senses and take time to appreciate nature.
 - ❖ Always thank them for coming out and celebrate their accomplishments!
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Conversation Starters

- ❖ Travel - Any travel plans coming up? Have you taken any trips recently? Where is the coolest place you have been to?
 - ❖ Hobbies - What do you do for fun?
 - ❖ Use your surroundings - Have you been on this trail before?
 - ❖ What is at the top of your bucket list?
 - ❖ What is the one skill you would love to learn?
 - ❖ What never fails to make you laugh?
 - ❖ What is one fun fact about yourself?
 - ❖ What is the funniest conversation that you have ever overheard?
 - ❖ What fad or trend do you hope comes back?
 - ❖ Have you read / seen anything interesting lately?
 - ❖ What has been inspiring you recently?
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Building Community

- ❖ Communication - create a team using a convenient app or platform to engage in ongoing conversations to celebrate accomplishments, share challenges, share photos, offer feedback / support - NOT ALONE
 - Microsoft Teams - create a Walking Team Chat
 - [Strava](#) - fitness tracking and social media app
 - [What's App](#) - free messenger app that allows users to create group chats
 - ❖ Consistency is key
 - Find out what motivates your team
 - Intrinsically or extrinsically motivated
 - Games, challenges, tracking, accountability
 - Being part of a group / team
 - Remember why you started. Focusing on this will help to overcome most excuses
 - If you are going out alone, listen to podcasts, audiobooks, explore new routes
 - ❖ Shared experiences
 - Goals
 - Set SMART goals, unique to each individual / team
 - Who?What?Where?When? Why? How?
 - Obstacles - be solution focused
 - Not enough time -> start with 10 minutes
 - Not a priority -> schedule time in your calendar "non-negotiable"
 - Too tired -> Scientists found that exercise boosts up our energy level
 - I am too slow/out of shape - we all start somewhere, acknowledge your starting point and any limitations and focus on consistency
 - Community Groups / Resources
 - [Parkrun/Parkwalk](#) - every Saturday at 9am at Eramosa River Trail, open to everyone
 - [Up and Running Guelph](#) - programs currently geared to women only
 - [Guelph Hiking Trail Club](#) - guests welcome on guided hikes
 - [Yorklands Green Hub](#) - The Yorklands Green Hub (YGH) is a non-profit organization working to create a one-of-a-kind green hub in Guelph for the benefit of the community on part of the former Guelph Correctional Centre (GCC) heritage lands. Check website for more information and upcoming events / guided walks
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