

# “Can exercise actually help relieve stress?”

Almost any form of activity is beneficial to our physical and mental health.



Most of us know that exercise is good for our bodies, but we find it difficult to fit into our busy schedules. You do not have to go to the gym for an hour a day to feel the rewards of moving more. The tips below address why even small increases in activity levels boost self-esteem, reduce risks for chronic disease and decrease stress levels.

## Why exercise to relieve stress?

- Any form of physical activity boosts your mood and relaxes your mind, whether it is going out for a walk, swimming, skiing or taking a yoga or Pilates class.
- Regular physical activity helps you fight off chronic diseases like high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Exercise releases endorphins (feel good hormones) which make you feel good, boost energy and promote better sleep.
- Repetitive motions such as walking can be a form of meditation. Focus on your movements, your breathing, and notice nature around you. Let go of daily stresses. Practice living in the moment.
- Following a regular exercise program will help you manage your weight. Physical activity and strength training elevate your metabolism. Managing your weight relieves the stresses associated with weight gain, such as fatigue and health problems.
- A strong body helps to create a strong mind. Incorporate muscle conditioning and flexibility exercises into your workouts or daily routines. Strength training challenges your body, which increases self-esteem.
- Always consult with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.

## How do we find time for exercise/physical activity?

- Do something you enjoy. When you look forward to your active time, you are more likely to fit it in and be consistent.
- Schedule activity time as you would any other commitment. Make a commitment to yourself by setting S.M.A.R.T. goals: specific, measureable, attainable, relative and timely.
- Break up your activity time. You may not have time for a 30-45 minute session. Three 10 minute activity breaks are just as effective for relieving stress.

- Be mindful of ways you can increase your activity levels doing everyday tasks. Go for a walk during lunch. Take the stairs, park farther away from the store/market.
- Keep exercise bands and small weights handy at work or when traveling. Always keep exercise clothes/shoes readily available. Keep a gym bag in the car or your sneakers by the door or under your desk at work.
- Exercise with a friend. This will give you time to cultivate your relationships and talk about your stressors.
- Change up your routine. Not only does your body become accustomed to the same activity, but your mind gets bored, too. Find new routes, new classes, or try exercising in a different room in the house. Simply changing the scenery, activity type or exercise intensity will promote both physical and mental benefits.

Think of activity as a time for you, not as another job you have to do. Find something you love, and fit it in whenever you have time. Ten minutes moving is better than 10 minutes sitting, especially if you are overwhelmed and stressed. A brisk walk is always a great way to clear your mind. With time, your activity breaks and scheduled exercise sessions will become a natural part of your daily routine and an important way to decrease your stress.

