

Exercise to boost your mood!

Physical activity can improve mood, from run-of-the-mill bad moods to diagnosed depressive illness. This impact has been shown by a large body of research over many years. In long-term studies of healthy adults, people who exercised regularly were less likely to have or to develop depression than more sedentary people. Also, physical activity is a valuable tool to treat depression. Its effects may be comparable to psychotherapy or drug therapy, and it is also helpful used in combination with other treatments.

Positive effects of exercise related to mood include improved sleep, reduced muscle tension, increased body temperature, lower levels of stress-related hormones and higher levels of endorphins, a brain chemical that relieves pain. Also, setting and reaching exercise goals can give you a sense of accomplishment and help you feel more confident.

Some other benefits of exercise, such as changes in body weight or cardiovascular health, may not be evident for weeks or months. In contrast, mood may improve after a single exercise session and the improved feeling may last for hours. Not everyone feels better when they begin exercising, so don't be discouraged if you don't feel better immediately. Choose activities you like and are most likely to do. Try different activities until you find at least one you enjoy. Pay attention to how hard you are exercising; be careful not to push yourself too much. Set goals that are easy

to achieve and work up to exercising longer, harder and more often. As you become stronger and more fit, try for at least a moderate level of exertion, which appears to be more effective than low-level effort. Use an inexpensive heart rate monitor to determine your level of effort, or use the talk test. If you can sing while you exercise, you are at a low level of exertion. If you can talk, that is a moderate level. The most benefit appears to come from 30 minutes or more activity, at least five times a week.

Pay attention to your feelings before and after exercise. A simple rating system for your mood, thoughts and energy level may help you realize the impact of your activity. Try to think of physical activity as a means to help you feel better, not as a burden. Take a good look at factors that might keep you from being active and then do some problem solving about how to get around them. Finally, be easy on yourself if you skip some exercise sessions or don't reach a goal. Put it behind you and start again.

This material is taken from *Exercise for Mood and Anxiety: Proven Strategies for Overcoming Depression and Enhancing Well-Being*, by Michael W. Otto and Jasper A.J. Smits, Oxford University Press, 2011, and www.mayoclinic.com, with contributions by Kristin Schneider, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, UMass Medical School.

Recipe of the Week: Light Mulled Cider

adapted from Jane Brody's Good Food Book -- makes 8 cups

1 quart cider
1 quart water
1 small orange, sliced thin
1 small lemon, sliced thin
4 sticks cinnamon
6 whole cloves
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
¼ teaspoon powdered ginger

1. In large saucepan, combine all ingredients.
2. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and simmer 30-40 minutes.
3. Strain cider and serve hot.

Nutrition information per one cup serving:

60 calories	Total Fat 0g
Cholesterol 0mg	Sodium 10mg
Carbohydrate 29g	Dietary Fiber 0g
Sugars 28g	Protein 0 g

Tip of the Week: Keep walking outdoors throughout the winter! Walking in snow burns more calories than on solid ground, even if you walk more slowly. Your leg muscles work twice as hard, and your core muscles work harder to maintain balance. Be sure to warm up and to stretch afterward. Dress appropriately with hat, gloves and layers. Drink plenty of water, since cold weather may change your sensation of thirst.

--- *Weight Watchers Magazine, November/December 2011.*