

Get Regular Exercise for Mental Health

Exercise is about more than keeping in shape. It also can help with your emotional and mental health. Exercise can help you improve your self-esteem, keep your mind off problems, and give you a sense of control.

In general, people who are fit have less anxiety, depression, and stress than people who are not active. Research suggests that exercise can help specific mental health problems. Exercise may help prevent depression from coming back (relapse) and improve symptoms of mild depression.¹

Be safe while you exercise

Moderate exercise is safe for most people, but it's a good idea to talk with your doctor before increasing your activity. Anyone age 65 or older should talk with a doctor before exercise.

- Start slowly, and gradually increase how much you exercise.
- Stop exercising if you have severe pain, especially chest pain, or severe problems breathing. Talk with your doctor about these symptoms.
- People who are likely to have high anxiety or panic may have an episode during exercise because of the buildup of certain body chemicals (such as lactic acid) from exercise. If you have any problems during exercise, talk with your doctor.

Tips for being active

It can be hard to be active when you feel depressed or anxious or have a mental health problem. But activity can help you feel better, so do your best to find a way to be active. It's fine to start with small steps. You can build up from a few minutes a day.

- Don't overdo it. Start with simple exercises, such as walking, bicycling, swimming, or jogging.

- Warm up your muscles for about 5 minutes before you start exercising. To do this, you can walk, slowly move your arms and legs, or do simple muscle stretches.
- Use the talk-sing test to see whether you're exercising at the right pace.
 - If you can talk during exercise, you're doing fine.
 - If you can sing during exercise, you can exercise a little faster or harder.
 - If you are not able to talk, you're probably exercising too hard. Slow down a bit.
- Cool down for 5 to 10 minutes after you exercise. It's okay to do some stretching exercises during cooldown.
- Drink water before, during, and after exercise.
- You can make daily activities part of your exercise program. You can:
 - Walk to work or to do errands.
 - Push a lawn mower, rake leaves, or shovel snow.
 - Vacuum or sweep.
 - Play actively with your children, or walk the dog.

Do your best to slowly work up to moderate activity for at least 2½ hours a week. Moderate activity means things like brisk walking, brisk cycling, or shooting baskets. But any activities—including daily chores—that raise your heart rate can be included. Find a pace that is comfortable. You can be active in blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week.

If you have problems exercising on your own, ask someone to exercise with you or join an exercise group or health club.

Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://www.MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)