

EXERCISE FOR MENTAL HEALTH: 8 KEYS TO GET AND STAY MOVING

By Christina G. Hibbert, Psy.D. at NAMI

The following overview of **8 Keys to Mental Health Through Exercise** can help you, your loved ones and those who provide medical and mental health care tackle underlying beliefs about exercise, change exercise-related thinking, overcome barriers and implement an effective exercise program.



1. Heal Your Mind and Body with Exercise

If you struggle with a particular mental illness, exercise has specific abilities to help you, too. From calming the anxious mind to regulating mood swings in bipolar disorder, exercise may be the best thing we can do for mental, physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. To receive the benefits of exercise, however, we must first believe that exercise can heal body, mind and soul.

2. Improve Your Self-Esteem with Exercise

Exercise improves self-esteem, which is associated with greater mental health. Exercise has also been shown to increase self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-acceptance and self-concept. When we exercise, we feel more loving, positive and confident.

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Working on the right thing is probably more important than working hard.

- Caterina Fake

Quotes sourced from Self By Design

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Book of the Month Recommendation

8 Keys to Mental Health Through Exercise

by
Christina Hibbert

In this inspiring book, Christina Hibbert, a clinical psychologist and expert on women's mental health, grief, and self-esteem, explains the connections between exercise and mental well-being and offers readers step-by-step strategies for sticking to fitness goals, overcoming motivation challenges and roadblocks to working out, and maintaining a physically and emotionally healthy exercise regimen.

3. Exercise as a Family

Family has a big influence on how we perceive exercise and mental health. Family beliefs can either promote or impair mental health. Exercising as a family not only gets the entire family moving to reap the benefits of exercise but also models healthy beliefs about physical activity and improves family relationships.

4. Get Motivated

Motivation, or rather lack of it, is probably the biggest block to exercise for mental health. We know we should exercise. We may even want to exercise, but we often can't make ourselves do it. Remember that motivation is a skill that can be learned and improved upon.

5. Change How You Think about Exercise

What thoughts do you have about exercise? What promotes physical activity? What holds you back? As we identify these thoughts, we can choose to change them. One tool for this is called a "thought record." As we list our thoughts and feelings about exercise on a thought record, we have the power to question and change our thoughts. We can put new, healthier thoughts into our brains—thoughts like, "I know if I go for a walk, I will feel more energized and less depressed."

6. Overcome Roadblocks

While exercising can be physically challenging, exercise is just as much, or even more, about mental fortitude. What are your biggest roadblocks to exercise? If you look carefully, you'll see that almost all of them have to do with mental perceptions and beliefs. Lack of time or energy? Not being able to get to the gym? Perhaps you face the challenge of having young children, or a job that's taking over your life. Whatever the roadblocks, you can overcome them as you acknowledge and challenge them.

7. Get FITT—Physically and Mentally

To stay with exercise for mental health, you must first build mental fortitude. That's why I've waited until Key 7 to discuss how to set up an exercise program. The FITT Principle shows how. FITT stands for Frequency (how often you exercise), Intensity (how hard you exercise), Type (of exercise you're doing) and Time (how long you exercise). Through FITT, you can create a tailored program for your unique needs.

8. Implement Your Vision and Flourish

Finally, we need a long-term vision of health and wellness to keep exercising for mental health for the rest of our lives. Exercise is beneficial at all ages and stages; as we look to the future, we find that by exercising for our mental health, we can help overcome mental illness and become who we are meant to be. We will flourish.

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