

MARK'S CORNER

EXERCISE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Research shows that people who exercise regularly have better mental health and emotional wellbeing, and lower rates of mental illness. Taking up exercise also may reduce the risk of developing a mental illness. Research has also shown an impact in mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety.

WHY DOES EXERCISE MAKE US FEEL BETTER MENTALLY

Often, people who exercise regularly do it simply because it makes them feel good. Exercise can boost your mood, concentration and alertness. It can even help give you a positive outlook on life. But there are lots of ways that exercise can benefit your mental health, such as:

- The levels of chemicals in the brain, such as serotonin, stress hormones and endorphins, change when you exercise.
- Regular exercise can help you sleep better. And good sleep helps you manage your mood.
- Exercise can improve your sense of control, coping ability and self-esteem. People who exercise regularly often report how good achieving a goal makes them feel.
- Exercise can distract you from negative thoughts and provide opportunities to try new experiences.
- It offers an opportunity to socialise and get social support if you exercise with others.
- Exercise increases your energy levels.
- Physical activity can be an outlet for your frustrations.
- Exercise can reduce skeletal muscle tension, which helps you feel more relaxed.

HOW TO GET START EXERCISING

It can be intimidating to start exercising if you haven't done it in a while, but a plan can help you start and stick with it.

Your new exercise plan has a better chance of success if you:

- See your General Physician or an accredited exercise physiologist before you start, and regularly as you continue your exercise plan.
- Choose an activity you like, or have enjoyed in the past, that suits your fitness levels and abilities.
- Start small – build up your activity gradually. Ideally, vary your activities so you don't get bored.
- Write your plan in your diary or on your calendar, so it's part of your schedule.

