



## About the Author:

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## Exercise and Mental Health

This year Mental Health America is focusing on mental illnesses October 3-9. One activity that may help someone with a mental illness is exercising. Going into cooler weather, now is a great time to get outside and move a little more. Exercise has been shown to not only help your physical body, but also your mental health. This can be helpful for people, especially in Ohio, around this time of year because you might feel anxiety or depression symptoms with the weather changing and less sunlight.

Exercising will help with mental health by releasing “feel good” chemicals shown to help with the overall wellbeing of a person. The task of exercising can allow someone to distract themselves from whatever they are worried about for the time being. Exercise alone can help a person gain more confidence in oneself. The opportunity of being in a group setting can also give one the opportunity to interact with others, which can also improve mental health. Exercising can be a healthy coping habit to replace a bad coping habit, such as smoking or drinking.

How do I achieve these benefits you may ask? It’s not as hard as it may seem. Something as simple as just going for a walk outside for 30 minutes 3 times a week will improve mood. If that seems too difficult, something as little as 15 minutes 3 times a week will make a difference. Making this a habit may seem like a big task, but find something enjoyable such as walking, biking, or even playing basketball with the kids. This will make it feel less like a chore and possibly make it more fun. Even while at work taking some time from lunch to go on a short walk will add up to make big changes. Taking the stairs when available is another great choice to get a little extra exercise in throughout the day. Maybe even get a friend involved in this new habit. It is less likely that you will be able to convince yourself to take the day off when there is a group of people holding each other accountable.

Set reasonable goals for yourself and make them attainable. If you have a mental health professional you go to, please ask them if this may be beneficial for your individual needs. Also, check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program to see how much activity they think is good for you. The CAN website is a good resource for starting physical activity. If you need ideas for where you can explore in the area, check out Places and Spaces for Fitness and Fun at <https://ccphohio.org/places-and-spaces/>. To get tips on how to increase activity in small measurable steps visit <https://ccphohio.org/can/be-active/> and get moving!