

Improve Your Physical and Mental Health in Just a Few Minutes a Day

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During the winter it is easy to forget about adding movement to your day. When the days are shorter and it gets dark so early many of us just feel like hunkering down in our comfy chairs by sundown. Sedentary activities like watching TV, video gaming and computer work are the most common night time activities in the winter months. At the same time our mental and physical health often suffers during these months. One approach to lowering bouts of anxiety and depression, improving mood, and gaining an abundance of health benefits is to add a few minutes of physical activity to your daily routine.

By adding physical activity, those struggling with their mental health may control or enhance their mood. Specifically, aerobic exercises are known to reduce anxiety and depression. An aerobic exercise is any exercise that requires oxygen. Breathing is most important during aerobic exercise because it allows the movement of oxygen to muscles (especially the heart). Some common aerobic exercises like swimming, cycling, dancing, walking, and gardening are often referred to as “cardio”. Anything that increases the heart rate qualifies as good mood-altering movement.

Physical activity is also responsible for improving cardiovascular health, stress relief, and for creating significant improvements to both health and mood. Here is a list of benefits related to physical activity:

- Improves sleep, memory, and mood
- Improves cognitive health
- Increases blood circulation to the brain
- Improves self-esteem
- Increases energy and stamina
- Weight reduction
- Cholesterol reduction

It is recommended that adults get 150 minutes of exercise per week which is about two and a half hours. This time can be spread throughout the week or divided between a few days. An easy approach to getting the recommended daily amount of physical activity is 30 minutes a day, Monday through Friday. Adding weekly workouts to your schedule may look like 30 minutes of walking, cross-country skiing, hiking, snow shoveling or water aerobics. No matter how you decide to enjoy physical activity each week, have fun and remind yourself of the many benefits that come along with an elevated heart rate.

If your day does not allow for 30 minutes of consecutive movement, take 5-minute movement breaks during zoom calls, while gaming, watching TV, or during the kids' nap. Another option is to wake up early to start your day with a High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) routine. HIIT routines consist of multiple exercises to be performed at the highest level of effort for a few minutes each exercise. Doing so will not only help to boost your mood but will provide a boost of energy to start the day.

There is no one “right” way to move towards a more active lifestyle; taking a couple of 15-minute breaks to go on a brisk walk is just as desirable as 30 minutes of jogging. Choosing physical activity that is enjoyable and easy to do is a terrific way to reach your weekly physical activity recommendation and at the same time decrease anxiety and depression.

Many people in Forest County are enjoying the **StrongBodies** strength training classes offered through the Forest County Aging Office and UW-Extension. For other Forest County activities supported by the Forest County Coalition on Activity and Nutrition (C.A.N.!) visit forestcountycan.org on the web or [forestcountycan](#) on Facebook.

Be Well, Be Active and Be Warm!

Learn more about UW (University of Wisconsin) - Extension Forest County at <http://forest.extension.wisc.edu> or call (715)478-7797.