# Positively exercise

To lose weight, to keep your heart healthy and blood pressure down, to look better in your favourite outfit; there are lots of different reasons out there that push people to get up off the sofa and exercise regularly. But for most people, motivation is tied up in the physical perks of workouts. The reality though is that regular physical activity can also offer plenty of emotional and psychological rewards. Exercise can help you:



**Battle depression.** A considerable amount of research suggests regular exercise is just as effective as prescription medication in battling mild to moderate depression. Why? Exercise releases endorphins in the brain which can help numb the body's pain perception. Ever notice how a good walk or workout can leave you feeling more upbeat and optimistic? That's because endorphins released during exercise can also result in a 'natural high' that can put a spring in your step. For an added boost try exercising outdoors as Vitamin D from the sun's rays is thought to act as a natural mood enhancer and can be especially helpful in combating the winter blues and Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) which are, in part, caused by reduced exposure to sunlight.

**Sleep more soundly.** Studies suggest that tiring your body out with a good workout in the morning or afternoon can also encourage a better snooze at night, helping you to fall asleep faster and slumber more deeply. A good night's sleep is also vital in battling the blues since insomnia and/or sleep disturbances are also a common sign of depression.

Be mindful of when you exercise though: working out too close to bedtime can actually have the reverse effect and can leave you staring at the ceiling, twiddling your thumbs into the wee hours of the morning.

**Blast away stress.** When you're moving, you're releasing physical tensions of the day. Scientists believe exercising, however, can also work to reduce the release of stress hormones, specifically cortisol, while increasing those mood-boosting endorphins. The result is a self-made stress-buster that can shed tension as well as emotional and physical baggage. Meditative activities like yoga and tai chi are great choices for calming the mind and spirit. In truth though, any physical activity can possess this kind of "meditative" quality. Running, team sports, swimming all shift the focus away from your daily stresses of work, family and personal strife and on to the "goal" at hand—be it running five km, beating your personal best swim time, or literally scoring a goal during a soccer match. For many people, exercise also offers vital social interaction that can help you feel more connected to others and your community which has also been shown to help reduce stress levels.

**Improve your sex life.** It may seem like a bit of a leap, but a number of studies indicate that exercise can actually improve activity in the bedroom for men and women alike. Since physical activity ups self-esteem, it's not surprising that data indicates people who work out feel more sexually desirable and satisfied.

Research at the University of British Columbia also revealed that women who engaged in physical activity were more sexually responsive than those who did not exercise. While another study from the Harvard School of Public Health suggests that physically active men are 30 per cent less likely to suffer from erectile dysfunction than their physically inactive counterparts.

**Sharpen your mind.** Okay, so exercise may not up your IQ, but it can optimize your brain power by helping you stay more relaxed, positive, focused and alert. This creates an ideal mindset for taking in, processing and remembering new information. On top of all this, there is scientific evidence showing that regular physical activity can reduce your chances of getting Alzheimer's and dementia.

Competing demands, an on-the-go lifestyle and the stresses of everyday living can make it easy to excuse yourself from regular physical activity and stay glued to the computer or couch. But with all the physical and emotional perks exercise has to offer, now is positively the time to say "yes!" to exercise*

*Remember to always consult your doctor before beginning a new exercise regime.