



# Healthy & Resilient You

## Mental Wellness

What's good for the body is good for the brain.

We know that eating a balanced diet and getting enough exercise is vital to physical health and wellbeing. But did you know that good physical habits may be just as important for mental health?

### The Belly - Brain Connection

A growing body of evidence shows that food choices can affect our mood and may play a role in the management and prevention of specific mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

#### Here are a few brain-healthy eating tips to consider.

**Stay hydrated.** Try to drink at least 8 glasses of water a day. Dehydration can cause fatigue and contribute to mood swings and poor performance. Avoid sugary drinks and be aware of your caffeine intake. Sugary drinks have empty calories which contribute to weight gain, and excessive caffeine can trigger panic attacks in people with anxiety disorders.

**Eat a wide variety of foods.** The more varied your diet, the more likely you are to get the nutrients you need. Try to go for a colorful diet—literally.

Plants and fruits of different colors will have different concentrations of health-building nutrients. So, eating the rainbow ensures you're giving your body and brain a variety of vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients that will contribute to overall wellbeing.

**Go fish.** Fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, and albacore tuna are high in omega-3 fatty acids. Omega threes have been found to improve thinking, memory, and even mood. As with any nutrient, getting omega-3 fatty acids from real food is best. But, if you don't care for fish, or have dietary or medical restrictions, talk to your doctor about potential supplements.

**Feed your gut.** Everything you consume feeds not only your body and brain, but the trillions of good bacteria that live in your gut. These colonies in our digestive tract are essential to maintaining a healthy immune system and maximizing the nutrients from the foods we eat. Supplementing our diet with beneficial bacteria has been shown to increase the health and biodiversity in our guts, so consider including fermented foods like kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, active-culture yogurt, and even dark chocolate. Yep. Chocolate is a fermented food. Who knew?

## Movement Matters

In popular culture, the term “muscle head” gets applied to people who seem to be more about the physical than the mental. As if lifting heavy objects and doing heavy thinking had to be mutually exclusive.

It may be time to rethink that label as science is continually connecting more and more dots between physical exercise and increased brain power.

It's common knowledge that exercise comes with a host of benefits like maintaining weight, reducing the risk of heart disease, reducing inflammation, strengthening immune systems, and boosting mood. A growing body of research indicates that we can add improving memory and cognitive function to the list.

So, how can we unlock these benefits for ourselves? Although researchers are still debating if there is a minimum amount of exercise we need to maximize health benefits, most agree that getting at least some exercise is better than none.

### **Here are some tips for adding more movement to your day.**

**Schedule it.** Planning time on your calendar to be active every day can make it easier to get started, and stick with an exercise routine. Block out time for a physical activity or exercise break either by yourself, in an online class, or with workout buddies.

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If you find your level of stress is impacting your well-being, you can contact us for additional help and support.

**Every movement counts.** Sit less. Take the stairs instead of the elevator when you can. Take breaks from your workspace (or couch) every 20 –30 minutes to stretch or walk around.

**Find the fun.** Exercise doesn't have to be tedious. In fact, if you can combine movement with an activity you enjoy, you're more likely to keep it up! Look for virtual exercise classes that offer high-energy and feel-good encouragement. Dance around to your favorite music, try out some dance or Zumba workout videos on YouTube, or, when community health recommendations allow, take an in-person class.

**Put some weight behind it.** If you have access to a gym or weight gear, great, BUT you don't need these things to get the benefits of weight training. **Bodyweight exercises** like pushups, dips, and squats can be effective and don't require any special equipment.

**Add a sunshine bonus.** When weather and location permit, take a walk or bike ride outside. Not only will the activity do you good, but you'll also get a boost of mood lifting vitamin D from the sunshine.

As always, before making big changes to diet or activity, it's a good idea to check with your doctor. Then, by taking a mindful and active approach to diet and exercise, you can enhance your physical and mental wellbeing, lift your mood, and maybe even decrease risk for some mental health disorders.

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