

# Exercise and wellbeing

**For general health, it is great to do 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity. If you can, one or two sessions a week of vigorous exercise is also great.**

Starting regular exercise is difficult, especially if you haven't done much exercise recently. Many people can get into a cycle of inactivity and depression that can be hard to break. Take it slowly, and be positive. If you need to, start with five minutes a day and build up slowly.

When you first begin, you may feel more tired and need a longer sleep. It's also important to remember that it takes a while before the benefits of exercise kick in. It won't happen overnight, but if you stick with it, it will happen! In the long run, doing exercise will actually give you more energy.

## Why does exercise make us feel better?

- Exercise releases endorphins, the 'happy hormone'. Endorphins are the chemicals our bodies release when we're happy. Our bodies also release endorphins when we exercise, making us feel happier.
- Exercise increases oxygen flow to the brain, which helps reduce anxiety and depression. It can also help us to breathe easier.
- Exercise can help you sleep better – because you are physically tired, you may be able to sleep deeper, and wake feeling more rested and energised.
- Exercise encourages activity of the adrenal glands. This releases hormones that help us cope better with stress and feel more alert.
- Exercise increases the level of brain neurotransmitters, like serotonin, that improve our mood and help our brain work better.
- Exercise will increase fitness. As we exercise our muscles develop, we can do more and feel that we have more energy.
- Exercise helps to increase confidence. As we do regular exercise we become fitter. We get better at exercise and feel more confident about what our bodies can do.
- Exercise helps us feel that we are better able to take control of our bodies. For example, exercise can help control cravings for particular kinds of food or cigarettes. Getting fitter also helps many women feel more in control. Exercise will give us a distraction from unpleasant thoughts and emotions.



- Exercise raises our body temperature. This can ease aches and pains temporarily, in the same way that having a hot bath does.
- Exercise makes your body work better, and might also increase your sexual energy.

## Exercise opportunities at home

- Brisk walks.
- Get off the bus one stop earlier, and walk the rest of the way to where you're going.
- Climbing stairs.
- Step ups on the front porch. Lots of people have three or four steps in front of their house. Use them by stepping up and down facing in one direction. Do it fast and get your heart rate up!
- Stretches – it's very good for your muscles to stretch them before and after exercise.
- Television shows. If these shows are too early for your exercise session, perhaps you could tape them:

'Move it or lose it'  
Channel 31, weekdays  
8.30–9am

## Some ideas to get motivated

- Do it with a buddy
- Just start doing something – anything that is easy for you. The benefits will come.
- Join a walking club or exercise group
- Reward yourself with nice, non-food things, like a hot bath or playing nice music

## For more information

Ring the Power On Team at  
Women's Health West on 9689 9588  
or look us up online at  
[www.whwest.org.au](http://www.whwest.org.au)



**Source:** Susan Lowe,  
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women's health west

**Power On!**

peer education program for women  
who have experienced a mental illness