

Physical Activity and Mental Health

**Theme PARC
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Mental Health week is a great time to start practicing mind and body fitness.

TORONTO, April 28, 2005 – In our efforts to be more physically fit, do we stop to think about our mental fitness? That's the question the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is asking us to ponder as it launches the 54th annual Mental Health Week on May 2. This year's Mental Health Week theme is *mind + body fitness*, which focuses on the connection between physical and mental health.

Supported by the CMHA's regional and community offices across the county, this national awareness campaign will offer many opportunities to find out how to achieve good mental health and overall well-being in our daily lives. Penny Marrett, CEO, CMHA National office, says that she anticipates some people will realize that they have unintentionally begun to look after their minds, and are even seeing positive results.

"Mental fitness is just as important as physical fitness, but it is not typically given the same recognition and support that we give our physical health," says Penny Marret, CEO, CMHA National office. "This year, during Mental Health Week, we are telling people across Canada that it is time to consciously focus on keeping our minds, as well as our bodies, healthy – to start practicing *mind + body fitness*."

The CMHA's new website, which launched on April 18, 2005, has a section with information on how to improve *mind + body fitness*. At www.cmha.ca, visitors will learn about mental fitness; tips to improve their mental health through mental fitness; and an online self-assessment tool to help them find out how aware they are of their own mental fitness. There are also real-life stories of simple ways that people from across Canada support their mental health.

"Everyone strives to live a healthy and well-balanced life; however, in order to achieve this, we really need to look above our shoulders," says Dr. Wendy Rogers, a clinical psychologist in Fredericton. "The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or illness. Simple activities like talking to a friend, taking a walk, and being aware of your feelings can really boost your mental health, and improve your overall well-being."

This year, the CMHA has some extra help getting the word out during Mental Health Week and beyond, with a new public service announcement (PSA) campaign. The campaign – three 30 second English TV spots and an English and French print PSA – were made possible by DDB Canada's Good Cause Award. CMHA was the inaugural recipient of this award in September, 2004. The PSAs take a humorous approach to

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practicing *mind + body fitness*, delivering the message: “Its one thing to look after your body. Just don’t forget about your mind.”

“At the CMHA, we believe that our society is ready to start taking an active role in improving our mental health,” Ms. Marrett adds. “We hope that this Mental Health Week campaign will start a trend toward mobilizing all people across our country to practice *mind + body fitness* in their own way, each and everyday.”

Mental Fitness Tips

1. **Daydream** – Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a dream location. Breathe slowly and deeply.
2. **“Collect” positive moments** – Make it a point to recall times when you have experienced pleasure, comfort, tenderness, or other positive things.
3. **Do one thing at a time** – When you are out for a walk or spending time with friends, turn off your cell phone and stop making that mental “to do” list.
4. **Exercise** – Regular physical activity improves psychological well-being and can reduce depression and anxiety.
5. **Enjoy hobbies** – Taking up a hobby brings balance to your life by allowing you to do something you enjoy because you want to do it.
6. **Set personal goals** – Goals don’t have to be ambitious, but reaching them will build confidence and a sense of satisfaction.
7. **Keep a journal** (or even talk to the wall!) – Expressing yourself after a stressful day can help you gain perspective and release tension.
8. **Share humour** – Life often gets too serious, so when you hear or see something that makes you smile or laugh, share it with someone you know.
9. **Volunteer** – Volunteering is called the “win-win” activity because helping others makes us feel good about ourselves, while widening our social network and bringing balance to our lives.
10. **Treat yourself well** – Cook yourself a good meal, have a bubble bath, see a movie, call a friend or relative. Whatever it is, do it just for you.

The Canadian Mental Health Association is a national, voluntary organization that exists to promote the mental health of all people and to serve mental health consumers, their families and friends through education, public awareness, research, advocacy and direct services, in more than 135 communities across the country. Visit the CMHA’s new website at www.cmha.ca for more information on all aspects of mental health and mental illness.

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In keeping with the theme of Mental Health week, PARC has researched and provided a comprehensive list of sources to further establish the relationship between physical activity and mental health.

Physical Activity is often promoted as a prescription for depression and anxiety and overall mental wellbeing. The following articles, reports, studies and information below will give you some sources of where to go for making the case for physical activity. Special thanks to the Canadian Mental Health Association for providing some of this information.

General Articles/Resources:

Up and Running? Exercise therapy and the treatment of mild or moderate depression in primary care

www.mentalhealth.org.uk

From the UK, this 60 page document outlines how exercise can assist in treating mild and moderate levels of depression. Available on the same site is a section called “Basic Facts” on exercise and depression. It is a very worthwhile read with many statistics and information. This section of the website is aimed at anyone interested in how physical exercise can help people recover from depression. It explains how people experiencing depression can use exercise to help make them feel better, and how they may be able to get 'prescriptions' for exercise from their Doctor. There is also information for Doctors and other health care providers who may wish to know more about the benefits of using exercise referral as treatment for depression.

Integrating Physical Activity Into Mental Health Services for Persons With Serious Mental Illness

<http://ps.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/short/56/3/324>

This article deals with the issue of physical activity assisting with low self-esteem and inactivity due to mental illness. It addresses how physical activity can also be helpful in chronic disease prevention such as heart disease and type II diabetes.

Promoting mental health through physical activity: examples from practice.

http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4122/is_200403/ai_n9465303

The physical health benefits of exercise are well established but there is also growing research evidence of links between physical activity and mental health benefits, including mood elevation, better cognitive functioning and improved self-perception, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The efficacy of physical activity intervention within mental health services:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/carfax/cjmh/1997/00000006/00000006/art00003>

Previous reviews of the literature concerning physical activity interventions have involved widely defined clinical populations, rather than focusing on studies conducted on subjects referred to specialist mental health services. The current review examines the efficacy of physical activity as a treatment intervention for out- and in-patients with

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anxiety and depressive disorders. The discussion covers comparison of outcomes between different types of physical activity interventions and between physical activity and other therapies. Implications for mental health services are explored and further research questions raised. The cost of this article is \$28.26 plus tax (USF)

The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute

www.cflri.ca

The CFLRI website has a series of papers that deal with the link between physical activity and mental health such as:

1. Exercise a plus for mental health
2. Exercise your way to self-esteem
3. Coping with Stress
4. Physical activity promotes sleep
5. Work out your stress
6. Sound body, sound mind. Sounds good!
7. Stress – steps for taking charge
8. The Research file

You will find these under “Tips for being active”

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Spring 2004 edition of Crosscurrents

http://www.camh.net/publications/healthybodiesmind_crcuspring2004.html#health

This issue has an article by Cindy McGlynn, entitled, “Active Bodies and minds: Physical activity promotes recovery from mental illness”.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has a brochure, “Seasonal Affective Disorder “ which talks about using exercise to prevent and combat symptoms of SAD. It can be downloaded at www.cmha.ca from the publications page of their website.

Medical News Today carried an article in September 2004, “The Benefits of Physical Activity”, which includes discussion of the benefits of physical activity to mental health.

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/newssearch.php?newsid=13772>

Specific to Children & Youth:

Physical Activity Cuts Risk of Depression in Children

<http://www.news-medical.net/?id=2991>

This research study shows the relationship between physical activity in Grade 7 and how it decreased the likelihood of depression in later years.

Physical Activity and Sport in the Lives of Girls – Physical and Mental Health

Dimensions form an interdisciplinary Approach –

<http://education.umn.edu/tuckercenter/pcpfs/default.html>

The President’s Council on Fitness and Sports addresses the issue of mental health and exercise and how it pertains to young girls. The full document can be downloaded.

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The Pulsus Group (the official Journal of Canadian Pediatric Society), the May/June 2002, Volume 7, Number 5 has a commentary by Dr. Peter Nieman, "Psychosocial Aspects of Physical Activity". This article can be found at:
www.pulsus.com/Paeds/07_05/neim_ed.htm

Specific to Older Adults:

Can physical activity improve the mental health of older adults? <http://www.annals-general-psychiatry.com/content/3/1/12/abstract>

The world population is aging rapidly. Whilst this dramatic demographic change is a desirable and welcome phenomenon, particularly in view of people's increasing longevity, it's social, financial and health consequences cannot be ignored. In addition to an increase of many age related physical illnesses, this demographic change will also lead to an increase of a number of mental health problems in older adults and in particular of dementia and depression. Therefore, any health promotion approach that could facilitate introduction of effective primary, secondary and even tertiary prevention strategies in old age psychiatry would be of significant importance. This paper explores physical activity as one of possible health promotion strategies and evaluates the existing evidence that supports its positive effect on cognitive impairment and depression in later life.

The Centre for Active Living has several papers form the Research update
www.centre4activeliving.ca:

1. Vol. 11, no. 1, March 2004 – Depression as a Barrier to Older Adult Participation in Physical Activity
2. Vol. 4, No. 4, June 1997 – The Effect of Physical Activity on Self-Concept: A Meta-Analysis

You will find them under Education – publications – Research updates.



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