

stay active for a healthy headspace





"I visited a clinician a few years ago who recommended that I start exercising to help support my mental health. Having always been active as a child, feeling depressed and low on energy had stopped me from keeping physically active."

Niharika, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

Staying active can improve your sleep, give you more energy and help manage stress – all helping you keep a healthy headspace.

Your mood when you move

We get it – when you're feeling stressed or low you probably feel more like watching TV than being active. Yet it's often that the moment you need it most is when you least feel like moving your body.

You may know that exercise is good for your physical health, but what you may not know is that it also improves your wellbeing too!

And exercising doesn't have to be running on the treadmill. It's really anything that gets your body moving and increases your heart rate. Activities like walking, playing team sports with friends, dancing or swimming will all help you release stress and give you a better chance at improving your mood.

There are so many benefits to staying active. It can:



help you sleep better



raise your energy levels



improve your confidence



boost your mood



release stress and lower anxiety.

Ask an expert: how can I get started?

Alex Parker is an Exercise and Mental Health Professor. Here are her tips to help you get active.

- Start small. If you start by setting small goals you will be more likely to do them and this will help you feel more motivated.
- Keep track. Monitor your progress and track how you feel after you exercise. This will help you see connections between how moving more helps you feel better.
- Do what you enjoy. Whether you enjoy working hard, for short periods of time, or prefer swimming at the beach, do what feels good. It will be a lot easier to stick to it if you're having fun!
- Make the time (even when you're busy). When you're busy and stressed, exercise can be the first thing you stop. Yet, being active during busy times will actually help you through tough periods.
- Set a routine. Plan ahead and make physical activity a part of your routine. Things like having your workout gear ready the night before and setting an alarm can help you stick to your goals.



"It wasn't easy to get back into it. I started small with short walks and built it up over time."

The more active I became – walking, running, weights at the gym – the stronger I felt and the more energy I had. I felt more calm and found it easier to focus. My self-esteem improved – being strong physically helped me feel stronger mentally."

Niharika, hY NRG member
(headspace Youth National Reference Group)

When you're feeling low and stressed, it's important to put healthy habits in place – to give yourself a better chance of coping with life's challenges.

Staying active is one of these healthy habits, but it's not the only one. Things like sleep, eating well, and spending time with people you love also play an important role in good mental health.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

The headspace Clinical Reference Group have approved this clinical resource. Fact sheets are for general information only. They are not intended to be and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific medical or health advice. While every effort is taken to ensure the information is accurate, headspace makes no representations and gives no warranties that this information is correct, current, complete, reliable or suitable for any purpose. We disclaim all responsibility and liability for any direct or indirect loss, damage, cost or expense whatsoever in the use of or reliance upon this information.
Version 1.3, 11 February 2020