

Employee Assistance Program

Your resource for help with daily challenges and difficult situations

May Is Mental Health Month

Understanding the Link Between Movement and Mental Health

Movement has a profound impact on mental health. Engaging in physical activity is 1.5 times more effective at alleviating stress, anxiety and mild-to-moderate symptoms of depression than taking antidepressant medications.

The connection between physical activity and mental health is deeply rooted in the intimate relationship between your mind and body. Below are ways exercise influences your mental wellbeing:

- Elevates your mood: Exercise triggers the release of endorphins—natural brain chemicals that create feelings of happiness and euphoria. This biochemical response enhances your overall sense of wellbeing by uplifting your mood.
- Reduces stress: Physical activity prompts your body's systems to communicate more closely, particularly when responding to physical stress. This heightened communication helps you respond better to stressors of all kinds.
- Keeps your mind sharp: Endorphins sharpen your concentration. Exercise stimulates the production of new brain cells, bolstering memory and helping prevent age-related cognitive decline.
- Alleviates mental health symptoms: Regular physical activity can ease symptoms of depression and anxiety, leading to an improvement in mental health.
- Builds your resilience: Embracing exercise as a coping mechanism builds resilience in managing emotional challenges. It's a healthier alternative to avoidance strategies, such as alcohol and drug misuse or overeating.

If you haven't yet incorporated exercise into your routine, don't worry! Start with walking or any other low-impact exercise. Experiment with different activities until you discover one that brings you joy and is sustainable in the long run. Your mind and body will thank you!

For more information about mental health resources, call your Employee Assistance Program at 1-866-EAP-4SOC (1-866-327-4762) TTY: 711 or visit eap.calhr.ca.gov.

Sources: Mayo Clinic, Huffington Post, CNN