

Know! Fitness #4Mind4Body

May is Mental Health Month; a time to raise awareness about the connection between physical and mental health, through the theme Fitness #4Mind4Body - sponsored by Mental Health America (MHA).

Two key messages MHA wants to share through this year's educational campaign are that (1) Mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and well-being, and (2) Mental illnesses are common and treatable.

A healthy lifestyle can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, as well as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and other chronic health problems. It can also play a big role in helping people recover from these conditions. Taking good care of your body is part of a smart approach to mental health.

In this Know! Tip, we focus on youth and exercise, and how the appropriate amount of it not only aids in controlling weight, but assists in improving mental health, helping our children live longer, healthier lives. Plus, youth who are regularly active are more likely to grow into adults who are regularly active – giving them a better chance of a healthy adulthood.

Here are some facts to keep in mind:

- Physical activity is related to lower mood levels less anxiety, and fewer substance use disorders.
- Those who make regular physical activity part of their routines are less likely to have depression, panic disorders, and phobias.
- One study even found that for people with anxiety, exercise had similar effects to cognitive behavioral therapy in reducing symptoms.
- Exercise also increases a variety of substances that play an important role in brain function including endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine.

When it comes to our children, how much and what types of exercise are considered appropriate?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years should have **60 minutes or more of physical activity each day.**

Aerobic:

- Aerobic exercise is rhythmic movements of large muscles, like jogging, running, bicycling, or swimming laps.
- Most of the 60 or more minutes a day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week.

Muscle-strengthening:

- Muscle-strengthening activities make muscles do more work than usual during activities of daily life. Muscle-strengthening activities may be unstructured and part of play, like playing on the monkey bars at the park, climbing trees, or engaging in a game of tug-of-war. Or these activities can be structured, such as lifting weights, using strength-training machines or using one's own body weight to perform exercises that target major muscle groups.

- As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and teens should include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.

Bone-strengthening:

- Bone-strengthening activities produce a force on the bones that promotes bone growth and strength, and is commonly achieved by impact with the ground. Running, jumping rope, basketball, tennis, and hopscotch are all examples of bone-strengthening activities. As these examples illustrate, bone-strengthening activities can also be aerobic and muscle-strengthening.
- As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include bone-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.

It is important to encourage young people to participate in physical activities that are age-appropriate, enjoyable, and that offer variety, to keep them wanting more.