

Physical Fitness Facilitates Recovery

written by Guest Author | June 4, 2018

When someone is recovering from a drug or alcohol addiction, it's important that they replace unhealthy attitudes and routines with new healthy lifestyle changes to help them withstand the rigors of recovery and embark on a new sober life. Physical fitness can be an important tool in the fight to stay sober and healthy.

An Exercise Routine Provides Structure

Drug and alcohol addiction create chaos and disorder in a person's life. Committing to a fitness regimen helps restore that missing structure, providing a new healthy focus for daily life. It encourages lifestyle changes that teach the patient to prioritize their own well-being, helping them learn to love and value themselves.

Exercise Fights Depression

Moderate physical movement, 30 minutes a day, five days a week, does more than just grow strong bones and muscles. It improves immune function and elevates mood through the release of [endorphins](#). These are hormones that act as natural pain relievers and antidepressants, helping to create a healthy natural high. [Studies](#) show that moderate exercise can be as effective as medication in treating severe depression among clinically depressed individuals.

Exercise Heals Damage

Substance abuse ravages the body's health and damages the cognitive functioning of the mind. It causes the death of neurons and rewires the brain's pleasure centers. A nutritious diet, coupled with a healthy exercise regimen, can help to repair the damage. Weight-bearing exercises, as well as resistance and strength training, help rebuild lost muscle mass and [strengthen bones](#) that have been weakened by malnourishment. Exercise may even help the brain to return to its original state before addiction.

What Kinds of Exercise?

The best exercise is the one you look forward to doing. If you're not big into the whole sweating thing, take up swimming. A yoga class is a great way to engage in stretching your muscles while focusing your mind. Studies show it lowers the stress response and boosts immune function. Get more bang for your yoga buck and take a friend along. There's good evidence that exercising with a friend makes you more likely to stick to your program. Or, consider [dog yoga](#). You benefit from bonding time with your pet, getting the emotional boost along with your workout. Mindfulness meditation helps to create a sense of inner peace and rejuvenation. Take your workout outdoors and benefit from sunshine and fresh air; studies show green exercise improves mood, shortens healing time, and can even [extend](#) your lifespan.

Exercise Helps You To Unwind

There is abundant evidence that moderate regular exercise helps people deal with stress and their emotional responses to it. Engaging in an enjoyable physical activity produces clear thinking and calms the mind. It encourages an optimistic mood and feelings of hope and self-esteem. You don't have to get your workout in all at once. It's just as effective to break those 30 minutes a day down into [10-minute increments](#). Space them out during the day. Take a refreshing walk before work, a bike ride in the afternoon, and a yoga class in the evening. Use exercise as a prophylactic therapy when you know you're going to be in a stressful situation — a preparatory walk in the woods before an unavoidable meeting with an old acquaintance can give you the strength to get through it. Or, if you've had a stressful surprise, take 10 minutes to breathe, meditate, and center yourself afterward to help you deal with what just happened. The stress-busting effects of exercise can be a potent tool for preventing relapse.

A healthy exercise regimen will increase your overall physical and mental health and improve your sense of well-being. It can help you to undo the damage your addiction has caused by replacing unhealthy habits with a healthy new lifestyle that supports your commitment to staying sober. Yoga, in particular, can be beneficial because it helps to reconnect the body and mind and teaches you to stay in the moment. All forms of exercise will help you to reduce your stress and improve your daily life as you make the journey through recovery.

Constance Ray

Constance Ray started [Recoverywell.org](#) with the goal of creating a safe place for people to share how addiction has affected them, whether they are combating it themselves or watching someone they care about work to overcome it. The goal is to share stories of hope from survivors who know that the fight against addiction is one worth having, because no matter how it affects you, life can get better.