

Exercising the Body Keeps the Mind Fit

Jan. 8 (HealthDay News) -- What if one therapy could help ward off addiction, depression, stress and even Alzheimer's, all the while keeping you slim and feeling great?

That mental-health "treatment" is as close as your own two feet -- [exercise](#).

"Exercise improves blood flow to the brain, it helps the body detoxify, it puts you on a better cycle of physical behavior, and it leads to decreased stress. It also improves thinking and mental function and decreases your tendency toward addiction," said Dr. Marc Siegel, an internist at New York University Medical Center and an associate professor of medicine at the NYU School of Medicine in New York City.

With each new study, experts are getting a better understanding of the intimate connection between the health of the body and that of the mind. And exercise -- the body's key method of [staying healthy](#) -- appears to be crucial to mental health, too.

For example, "there's evidence that exercise is maybe the best non-pharmacological antidepressant we have -- studies have shown that it works better than some drugs. It's also a great anti-anxiety intervention," said James Maddux, a professor of psychology at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., and an expert on the mind-body [health](#) connection.

[Aerobic exercise](#), such as running or swimming can lead to a healthy release of the body's natural opiates, neurochemicals called endorphins. These are natural stress-busters, Siegel said, but exercise's impact on stress goes "way beyond endorphins."

"Exercise is a ritualistic activity that redirects your energy," said Siegel, who is also the author of a book on worry and stress called *False Alarm: The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear*. "Stress is a build-up of inactivity, of over-thinking without release," he said. "But exercise gives you a physical release that diminishes that psychic frustration."

For many people, exercise also provides a valuable sense of control over their physical health. "It's that sense of a loss of control that can lead to stress," Siegel said. And physical activity -- especially when individuals join sports clubs, teams or have workout partners -- also increases socialization, which has been proven to boost mental and physical health and increase lifespan.

Regular workouts may even help smokers beat their addiction, researchers say.

For example, one study from Brown University found that women looking to quit smoking who engaged in a vigorous [exercise program](#) were more than twice as likely to have stayed away from cigarettes for at least one year, compared to women who simply took part in a smoking-cessation program without exercise.

The Brown team believes that exercise may have helped smokers deal with the stress of quitting. As an added bonus, the study also found that exercising ex-smokers were able to stave off much of the weight gain typically associated with [quitting smoking](#).

A fit, active body may even help reduce risks for Alzheimer's disease by improving cerebrovascular blood flow, experts say.

"There's no question that exercise improves blood flow to the brain," Siegel explained. One recent U.S. study found that seniors who engaged in some form of minimal exercise at least three days a week cut their risk of developing Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia by as much as 30 percent to 40 percent.

So, the advice from experts: Get out there, and get active.

"Exercise is clearly a discipline or ritualistic activity that you can use to break your cycle of worry and get on a path toward better health," Siegel said.

SOURCES: Marc Siegel, M.D., internist, New York University Medical Center, and associate professor, medicine, NYU School of Medicine, New York City, and author, *False Alarm: The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear*; James Maddux, Ph.D., professor, psychology, George Mason University, Fairfax, Va.

Strength Training Exercises for Your Walking Muscles

Power Up Your Walking Muscles

Five steps to a stronger stride

By [Maggie Spilner](#), Former *Prevention* Walking Editor, Maggie Spilner, is the author of *Prevention's Complete Book of Walking*. She is currently organizing walking trips, lecturing, and working on a new walking book.

Instead of just turning on the tube when the weather's crummy, you can boost your walking power. "Strength training on frigid or rainy days is a smart way to use your time. When better weather beckons you outside, your walks will feel effortless, because your legs will be stronger," says Leslie Sansone, group exercise instructor and creator of in-home walking videos.

To get you started, *Prevention's* Fitness Editor Michele Stanten created a simple, 10-minute strength training routine that targets your legs, buttocks, and feet.

Do this routine 2 or 3 days a week. Warm up before you start by marching in place for a few minutes. Do the same to cool down, then stretch your leg muscles when you are finished.

To log some indoor mileage, check out [Sansone's videos](#) or call (724) 658-1400 for a catalog.



Walking Lunges (strengthens all leg muscles)

Take a big step forward with your left foot, then slowly lower your right knee toward the floor. Your left knee should be at a 90-degree angle. Press into your left foot, and stand back up, bringing your right foot forward next to your left. Repeat, stepping with your right foot, and continue across the floor. Do eight times with each leg. If this is too difficult, do lunges in place, eight on one side, then switch, and repeat on the other side.

Heel Walk (helps avoid burning shins)

Walk for 30 seconds on your heels only, with your feet flexed and your toes pointing

Toe Walk (strengthens calves)

Walk on the balls of your feet, heels off the floor, for 30 seconds. Repeat three more times.

toward the ceiling. Repeat three more times. three more times.



Lift Kick

(targets thighs and buttocks)

Lift your right leg, bending your knee 90 degrees. Your thigh should be parallel to the floor. 2. In a smooth motion, sweep your leg back, pressing through your heel and squeezing your buttocks. 3. Without touching the floor, lift your leg up in front again, and repeat. Hold onto a chair or wall for balance if needed. Do 8 to 12 times with each leg.

Double Toe Raise

(works feet and shins)

Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Lift just your toes, then lift the rest of your foot, with your heels staying on the floor. Lower your foot, then your toes. Repeat 8 to 12 times.

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The Right Shoes for Walking

By [Wendy Bumgardner](#), About.com

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What is the right shoe for walking? "The #1 shoe is the one that fits your #1 foot," is the anthem of John Olsen of Pacesetter Athletic, a technical sports shoe store in Portland, Oregon. Walkers should think fit, flat, flex when choosing a walking shoe.

Fit

Size Counts

- Athletic shoes all tend to run short, says Olsen. If your shoes are too short, you will get blisters and aggravate bunions. Your athletic shoe size will run 1 to 1 1/2 sizes bigger than what you wear for dress shoes.
- Your foot swells as you walk and as you stand around during the day. To get the right shoe, in the morning there should be a thumbnail's width between the end of your longest toe and the shoe. In the afternoon or after walking, it should still be 1/2 a thumbnail.
- Don't lace your shoes really tight, you can aggravate foot problems as your feet expand during walking.

Roll with it

- Most people pronate - with each step they hit with the heel and then the foot rolls inward. Overpronation occurs when you roll too far inward and "roll off" the shoe. To correct for overpronation, shoes are made with different lasts - the shoe itself curving inward or not.

- Curved last shoes have pronounced inward curvature to enhance the inward rotation most people have with each step.
- Semi-curved lasts often have an area of the sole with dual density material that halts the inward rotation to prevent overpronation.
- Straight lasts have no inward curvature and are best for those who overpronate.

Lack of support:

- Athletic shoes have no arch support. Some appear to have it by undercutting the sole at the arch, so it feels like it is supported, but in fact is not.
- The result is an epidemic of plantar fasciitis and heel spurs, as the bottom of your foot is wounded, bruised and calcifies.
- If you have a high arch, protect it by buying an insole with arch support for your shoe.
- Racewalkers should not train in racing flats - they have zero support and can lead to injury. Save them for the race.

Flex

- "Walking" shoes and crosstrainers as designed by the shoe industry are too stiff and are not yet designed with motion control features found in running shoes.
- These motion control features prevent overpronation and injuries such as shin splints, plantar fasciitis, iliotibial band syndrome, bursitis and tendonitis.
- The shoe industry will be moving in the next few years to add motion control features to walking shoes and hiking shoes, but for the present it is best to wear good quality running shoes that fit your #1 foot.
- Your foot needs to roll through each step, striking with the heel and rolling rather than just clomping down or striking and flapping down with a smack. Stiff soled shoes prevent this natural motion.

Flat

- Running shoes often have a raised heel or one with a wide heel counter to meet the motion needs of a running stride. Walkers do not need these features.
- The flatter the heel the better - look at it in relation to the sole under the ball of the foot and choose a shoe with the least height difference.
- Rather than having a heel that flares out on each side and at the back, you want a plain heel or one that is cut in at the back to allow you to roll when you strike with your heel and roll through the step.

The Life of a Shoe

- You should wear different shoes for walking, aerobics, and work.
- Shoes in general have a 500 mile lifespan.
- Old shoes that have been in the warehouse age themselves. The glue dries out and hardens. The soles dissipate. They won't last as long as new shoes. This why they were on sale! Don't stockpile your favorite shoe, buy new fresh ones as needed.
- Rotate your shoes by buying a new pair 4 - 6 weeks after your present pair, with the same stability but a different model. Alternate them each time you walk.
- You will be able to recognize then when the older pair dissipates - it won't feel as good as the newer pair.

- Different styles will work different bones and muscles, so you will be less likely to have an injury.

Next: [Finding the Right](#)

Transcript: Get a Better Walking Workout by Avoiding these Pitfalls

Hi, I'm Wendy Bumgardner your Guide to Walking at About.com. Walking the right way can lead to better health and fitness.

Walking the wrong way can lead to wasted effort or even injury. Avoid these five walking mistakes:

1. **Head down.** Looking down while you walk can lead to problems with your back, neck and shoulders. Instead, keep your head up, and your eyes focused 10 to 20 feet ahead.
2. **Leaning.** Leaning forwards or backwards while walking can result in back pain. Stand up straight but with relaxed shoulders. Your chin up and parallel to the ground. Pull in your abs and tilt your pelvis slightly forward so you can stand tall and walk without a swayed back.
3. **Overstriding.** When walkers try to walk faster, they often reach out further with the forward foot. Instead, concentrate on taking shorter, quicker steps and really pushing off with the back foot. You will soon be walking faster and with more power. This will also help prevent shin splints and other problems.
4. **No Arms.** Walking without any arm motion is a mistake. Use your arms when you walk to add power and speed. Bend your arms ninety degrees and swing them naturally back and forth.
5. **Chicken-winging.** Swinging your arms too much is also a mistake. Instead, keep your arms close to your body and swing your arms mostly back and forward. Your hand should not cross the center line and should come up no higher than the breast.

Now you're walking without the walking mistakes. Keep your chin up, don't lean forward, use your arms, don't overstride, no chicken-winging, and smile.

Thanks for watching. To learn more, visit us on the Web at Walking.About.com.