

May

THE MONTHLY MOVE

BENEFITS OF HIKING: PHYSICAL, MENTAL & BEYOND

PHYSICAL HEALTH BENEFITS

- Hiking is cardiovascular in nature, so it can provide great benefit to heart health while also improving blood pressure and blood sugar levels.
- Hiking helps increase the strength in the leg muscles, builds stability in the core muscles and enhances balance skills. The more technical the terrain is, along with an increase in climbing intensity, the more balance and core strength is required because more muscles are being recruited to manage the steeper terrain.
- The intensity of a hike can be altered to fit the ability of the person hiking, from a simple hiking path in a neighborhood to a challenging climb up a mountain, which makes hiking accessible to all abilities and across all ages.
- The hillier the trail is, the harder your heart will work, therefore increasing the potential cardiovascular benefit.

MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

- Research suggests that hiking mountainous areas with altitude differences can increase feelings of valence (pleasure), elation (or happiness) and calmness, and feelings of anxiety and fatigue may decrease immediately after hiking.
- A study by researchers at Stanford University showed that spending time in nature reduces rumination, or the repetitive thought patterns about negative emotions. This same study demonstrated that spending time in nature may improve mental well-being as well as provide people who live in urban areas the reprieve they need for reducing negative thought patterns.
- Being in nature decreases anxiety and includes some benefits such as an increase in cognition and affect, or feelings and emotions. Being in nature may also provide the opportunity to be more mindful and present to the moment you're experiencing, which has been shown to reduce stress and blood pressure.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- First, start with shorter hikes on more familiar trails that are near you—this will make it easier for you to get started.
- Stiffer-soled shoes can help support your feet by providing a more stable grip on uneven and potentially slippery terrain (hiking-specific footwear is ideal). A good pair of shoes can also help prevent ankle injuries or falls as you start hiking (and when you may have less leg strength and overall stability). Ideally, these shoes should be well broken-in to reduce the potential for blisters.
- Come prepared with ample fluid and a few snacks (even if you don't think you will be outside for very long) and be sure to wear clothes appropriate for the weather. Dress in layers to help you stay warm in cooler climates, and be sure to wear sunscreen, even on cloudy days.
- Have a clear understanding of the route you will take by using a map or an application on your smartphone. Even better, bring a friend along to join you on the hike, which can help make the time more enjoyable and enhance your feelings of connection (which is also important for positive mental health).

