

4 Fun Ways to Stay Fit and Keep Your Spirits Bright

Unless you have a real fairy godmother, wishing and hoping for stress-free holidays is probably going to be a waste of your precious time. However, if you want to do a better job of coping with any stress that does come your way, there is one habit that practically guarantees better physical and mental health - any time of year! That is physical activity - aka exercise. (If using the "E" word makes you think of something sweaty and unpleasant, try calling it "moving your body.") In terms of your health, almost any kind of movement has benefits. For optimal results, aim for at least 10 minutes of activity at a time, at least 30 minutes per day, at least 5 days a week.

Put activity on your busy schedule.

When something is important to us, we write it on our calendar or type it into our PDA. So, make physical activity just as important as your other business and social obligations. Write it into your schedule. Figure out where you can carve out time to spend in the yard, at the gym, at yoga class, or just walking around the block - and then put it in writing. Planning ahead to be physically active makes it much more likely that you will get into the habit of moving your body every day.

Celebrate with active parties.

Think of all the wonderful ways that you can celebrate the season - and be active at the same time. Dancing is always a great place to start, even if you are just rockin' to some tunes while cleaning the house. Depending on weather, there are lots of delightful options: building snow men, making snow angels, or sledding; walking through the neighborhood to carol or look at holiday lights; or active indoor fun for people of all ages, with games such as *Twister*® and *Hullabaloo*®.

Give yourself a time out.

An active 10-minute "time out" will probably be more energizing than a donut break or a nap. Give yourself a 10-minute break to do some yoga stretches, a few Pilates moves, or just to take a walk. Simple brisk walking is one of the activities most often recommended by fitness experts - and all you really need are comfortable shoes. So, keep a pair at your desk or in the car - and you can take ten around your office building, around the block, around a park, or around the ranch.

Get into the laugh habit.

Is laughing a form of physical activity? You betcha! Many studies confirm that laughter is powerful "medicine" indeed, with both short and long term benefits. A rollicking good laugh can relieve tension, soothe stress, and reduce aches and pains throughout your body (especially in your stomach and head). How to get your holiday laughs? Almost any game or silly dancing with small children is a great place to start! Or how about a stroll-and-giggle with a funny friend?

DID YOU KNOW - OUTDOOR ACTIVITY MAY BE BETTER THAN INSIDE EXERCISE? A small, but growing, group of studies have shown that outdoor activities may have more mental benefits than indoor ones. So called "green" activities, such as outside walks and gardening, may be more effective at reducing tension, relieving stress, and improving concentration in children with attention disorders. Maybe it's time to put on those comfortable shoes, grab your jacket and a hat, and head outdoors for a brisk, energizing walk.