



Boost your mood and connect with a hobby

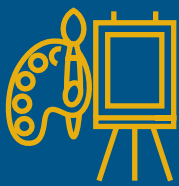
Spending time on an activity that you enjoy can improve your mental health and wellbeing. In fact, people with hobbies may be less likely to experience stress, low mood and depression.

Activities that get you out and about can make you feel happier and more relaxed. Group activities like team sports can boost your social connections, provide new relationships, and improve your existing ones.

Why do hobbies work?

Hobbies improve mental health because of how they affect the reward system in the brain. When we take part in a hobby that we enjoy, chemical messengers in the brain (known as neurotransmitters) are released – such as dopamine, a chemical which helps us feel pleasure. These feel-good chemicals can then make us want to do the hobby again, and feel more motivated to do so.

So even though we may not feel motivated in the beginning to spend time on a hobby, once we start it and feel the associated pleasure, this will kick-start our reward system and subsequently our motivation to do it again.



I don't have time for a hobby!

Many of us have let hobbies fall away as our lives get busy and we unthinkingly reach for our phone or other screen when we snatch a few moments to ourselves. What we don't realise is that short grabs of screen time add up to hours during the day – some of that time could be spent on a hobby!

Spending as little as 20 minutes on a hobby such as reading, drawing, Sudoku, singing or a jigsaw puzzle can lift you out of the demands of the day and boost your mood.

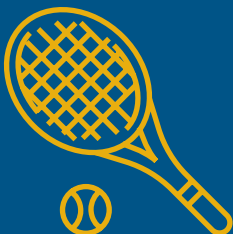
What should I do for a hobby?

The number one criteria is that you enjoy it! Whether you do something creative, athletic or academic, the idea is to do something new and learn a skill. Productive hobbies not only keep the creativity in you alive but also reduces absenteeism, unproductivity and burnout at work.

Physical hobbies such as exercise, aerobics and dancing can liven up your mood and ensure that you not only feel happy but healthy as well.

Creative hobbies like playing a musical instrument, reading, solving puzzles or painting can help boost your memory, keeping mental illnesses like Alzheimer's and dementia at bay.

Hobbies in general are also a great way to boost social connections and prevent loneliness, which is another increasing problem leading to mental disorders.



Are you addicted to your screen?

Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2022 report on 'How Australians use their time' reflects alarming numbers about screen usage. Between November 2020 and July 2021, 75% of people watched TV and video for an average of 2 hours 55 minutes a day, and 36% engaged in general internet and device use for an average of 1 hour 1 minute daily.

However, only 30% participated in some sort of exercise, sport or outdoor activity for an average of 1 hour 29 minutes a day. The percentage of people engaging in reading was even lower with 22% of people reading for an average of 1 hour 26 minutes daily.

Excessive screen time is known to increase eye strain, headaches and physical fatigue and can cause sleep impairment. It has been linked to psychological problems like depression, anxiety, addictive behaviours, lack of concentration, stress and low cognition.

How to reduce screen time?

- Set a time limit on a daily basis and try sticking to it.
- Adhere to the 'no phone' rule in the bedroom before going to sleep.
- Create no-tech zones in your house like your dining area or bathrooms.
- Designate an hour every day for a hobby, be it reading, painting or music.
- Learn a new skill like a new language or musical instrument.



Chocolate date bark

A deliciously healthy desert recipe to liven up your mood!
Serve 10 / Prep 10 min, chill time 15 min

Ingredients list

- ▶ 10 - 12 pitted dates, sliced into half
- ▶ 2 tbsp peanut butter (in drippy consistency)
- ▶ 2 tbsp chopped peanuts
- ▶ Half cup of dark chocolate chips
- ▶ 1 tsp of olive oil
- ▶ Flaky sea salt

Method

- ▶ Line a baking tray with parchment paper. Slice the dates vertically.
- ▶ Press the halves down onto the sheet, making sure they overlap a little so they stick together.
- ▶ Drizzle peanut butter on top and use a spoon to spread it across evenly. Sprinkle some chopped peanuts on top.
- ▶ Melt the chocolate chips with olive oil. Use a spoon to spread it over the peanut butter layer until it gets completely coated.
- ▶ Sprinkle some sea salt and pop the baking sheet into the freezer for 10-15 minutes or until the chocolate is set.
- ▶ Take the tray out from the freezer and chop the bark into 10 pieces and enjoy.



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