



## Mental health benefits of exercise

Exercise causes your brain to release 'feel good' chemicals (endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin), which help improve your mood. Often, people who exercise regularly do it simply because it makes them feel good, such as the common runners high. Exercise can boost concentration, mood and alertness. In some cases, it can even help you have a more positive outlook on life.



### There are many ways that exercise can benefit your mental health:

- Reduces stress as the brain has changes in serotonin, stress hormones and endorphins
- Regular exercise can help you sleep better. Good sleep helps manage your mood.
- Improved sense of control, coping ability and self-esteem.
- Exercise can help distract you from negative thought patterns, like meditation and mindfulness
- Group sessions offer an opportunity to socialise with others.
- Increased energy levels.
- Physical activity can be an outlet for your frustrations
- Exercise can reduce muscle tension which will help you feel more relaxed.

Regular exercise reduces the risk of mental illness and helps with the management of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. For mild to moderate depression, research suggests that physical activity can be as effective as antidepressants or psychological treatments, like cognitive behavioural therapy. Using movement as medicine can be a valuable addition to other treatment options.

The physical benefits of exercise are also important for people with mental illness. It improves your cardiovascular fitness and overall physical health. This is important as people with mental health issues are at a higher risk of suffering from chronic health conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and asthma.





## How do I start exercising?

If you aren't already exercising, you may be wondering what kind of commitment you need for exercise to give you a mental boost. The good news is that exercise doesn't have to be strenuous or take a long time to get some benefits.

Start with simple activities like:

- Going to the shops
- Gardening
- Household chores
- Cooking

At your own pace, try to build up to doing 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day, such as:

- Bike riding
- Walking
- Swimming

If you have a pedometer or smart watch, you can also monitor your steps and set walking goals. At first, aim for around 1000 steps a day. Eventually, try to aim for 8000 – 10,000 steps per day.

### Exercise Outdoors

For even greater benefits, it is recommended to exercise outdoors. Recent studies have shown that people report higher levels of:

- vitality
- enthusiasm
- pleasure
- self-esteem

and lower levels of:

- tension
- depression
- fatigue
- stress
- anxiety

after they walked outside. People who exercise outside also say they are more likely to exercise again compared to those who stay indoors.

## Caramelised onion butter bean bake

*This one pot wonder is perfect for breakfast, lunch or even a light dinner.*

**Prep time 5mins | Cook time 15 mins | Serves two**

### Ingredients list

- ▶ 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- ▶ 2 red onions, finely sliced
- ▶ 1 large zucchini, halved lengthways then finely sliced
- ▶ 2 garlic gloves, crushed
- ▶ 2 tbsp tomato paste
- ▶ 400g tin butter beans
- ▶ ½ cup Greek yoghurt
- ▶ ½ cup milk
- ▶ ½ cup shredded cheese
- ▶ 2 cup curly kale, finely chopped
- ▶ 50g feta cheese
- ▶ 2 slices sourdough bread, toasted

### Method

- ▶ Heat a large frying pan on medium heat. Add olive oil, onion and zucchini. Cook for 10 minutes until onion is softened and sweet. Stir often.
- ▶ Add garlic, tomato paste and cook for a further 2 minutes. Stirring often.
- ▶ Pour in the beans along with the liquid. Then add yoghurt, milk, shredded cheese and kale.
- ▶ Simmer for 5 minutes then top with crumbled feta cheese. Serve with bread.

### Tips:

**For a gluten free option, replace sourdough with your choice of gluten free bread.**



Lvl 3, 170 Railway Parade,  
West Leederville WA 6007

(08) 9483 8888  [lgiswa.com.au](http://lgiswa.com.au)

The information in this document is general in nature and is not intended to be relied upon as advice regarding any individual situation and should not be relied upon as such.

This information is based on sources we believe to be reliable but we make no representation or warranty as to its accuracy.

No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by an information storage or retrieval system, except as may be permitted, in writing, by LGIS.

LGIS is managed by JLT Public Sector, a division of JLT Risk Solutions Pty Ltd (ABN 69 009 098 864 AFS Licence No: 226827) ("JLT") and a business of Marsh McLennan.

© 2024 JLT Risk Solutions Pty Ltd. All rights reserved. LCPA 22/187.

The LGIS WorkCare Services team are specialist health and wellbeing professionals.

**Contact the team on 9483 8888 for more information on our health and wellbeing services.**