

Exercise boosts satisfaction with life, researchers find

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Had a bad day? Extending your normal exercise routine by a few minutes may be the solution, according to Penn State researchers, who found that people's satisfaction with life was higher on days when they exercised more than usual.

"We found that people's satisfaction with life was directly impacted by their daily physical activity," said Jaclyn Maher, graduate student in kinesiology. "The findings reinforce the idea that physical activity is a [health behavior](#) with important consequences for daily well-being and should be considered when developing national policies to enhance satisfaction with life."

The team examined the influence of physical activity on satisfaction with life among emerging adults ages 18 to 25 years because this population's sense of well-being appears to worsen more quickly than at any other time during adulthood.

"Emerging adults are going through a lot of changes; they are leaving home for the first time and attending college or starting jobs," said Maher. "As a result, their satisfaction with life can plummet. We decided to focus on emerging adults because they stand to benefit the most from strategies to enhance satisfaction with life."

The researchers recruited two groups of college students at Penn State. The first group, consisting of 190 individuals, entered information into a diary every day for eight days. The second group, consisting of 63

individuals, entered information into a secure website every day for 14 days. Both groups answered questions aimed at determining participants' satisfaction with life, physical activity and self-esteem. The [personalities](#) of all participants in the first group were assessed at the outset of the study using the Big Five Inventory short form.

For the second group (the 63 individuals who filled out questionnaires online for 14 days), the researchers wanted to further investigate whether physical activity was indeed, the cause of participants' increased satisfaction with life rather than some other factor such as mental health, fatigue, or Body Mass Index.

"Shifts in depression, anxiety and stress would be expected to influence a person's satisfaction with life at any given point in time," said David Conroy, professor of kinesiology. "In addition, fatigue can be a barrier to engaging in physical activity, and a high Body Mass Index associated with being overweight may cause a person to be less satisfied in a variety of ways."

By controlling for these variables, the researchers were able to determine that the amount of [physical activity](#) a person undertakes in a particular day directly influences his or her satisfaction with life. Specifically, the team found that by exercising just a little more than usual a person can significantly improve his or her satisfaction with life.

The results appeared online this week in the journal *Health Psychology*.

"Based on these findings, we recommend that people exercise a little longer or a little harder than usual as a way to boost [satisfaction](#) with life," said Conroy.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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