

How to stay active if you're staying at home

March 18 2020, by Michael Brown and Nicole Graham



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Exercise may be more important now than ever in shoring up people's mental health, according to a University of Alberta physical fitness expert.

"In a time like right now, when we're worried about our health and about

what to do if we are quarantined, being able to reduce that anxiety and stress through physical activity is a must," said Nora Johnston, director of the U of A's Centre for Active Living.

She said although there is no clear consensus among researchers about why physical activity is effective in improving mood—with most experts proposing that the release of dopamine and endorphins during exercise results in a state of relaxation—she said there is no denying its effectiveness.

"Research shows whereas medication usually takes a couple weeks to get to a level where it's making a difference, physical activity has an immediate impact on mood," she said.

Importance of routine

Unfortunately, if adhering to a physical fitness regime weren't already hard enough, staying physically active has become even trickier to maintain with the closure of workout facilities and the prospect of self-isolating or being quarantined.

In these unusual times, Johnston said, routine is the first key to success.

"If you're limiting contact with people, I think it's really easy to fall out of your routine and just let things roll," she said. "But if you normally get up and go for a walk at six in the morning, you should continue to do that."

Johnston said parents who are now at home should take this opportunity to get physically active with their children.

"You might want to play active games with them—good old Twister, for instance. It certainly won't get the [heart rate](#) up but it's good for balance

and flexibility—and a few good laughs," she said.

"It's also a great time to get outside to play tag, or participate in a sport like soccer that gets your heart rate up."

Johnston said it's also [high time](#) to activate gym equipment that has sat dormant in the basement or take your workout to the river valley, and then challenge your friends to do the same.

"It might be a good idea to post your workout on social media, then you're kind of held to that expectation and you can challenge others. It's like making a virtual social fitness group."

She added, everyone should try to comply with the [Canadian physical activity guidelines](#) calling for 150 minutes of vigorous exercise per week, which includes resistance training.

"There's so much right now that we can't control, and we have no way of managing how the world is responding to this virus. But [physical activity](#) is one of the things you can control—and it will make you feel better."

Provided by University of Alberta

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