

# Exercise, mindfulness help children with ADHD

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Just 10 minutes of exercise and 10 minutes of mindfulness meditation can help children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) with their mood, self-efficacy and attention.

This is according to a new study from education professor Barbara Fenesi and co-authors Hannah Bigelow, Marcus Gottlieb, Michelle Ogrodnik and Jeffrey Graham, published in *Frontiers in Psychology*.

Fenesi said these findings allow teachers and parents to customize behavioral interventions to target a child's specific needs.

"We want to identify behavioral approaches that could help manage ADHD symptoms for [children](#) and determine whether even a single, short bout of these behavioral approaches could be beneficial, rather than needing to engage in them for long periods of time," Fenesi said.

At the same time, [exercise](#) and mindfulness meditation are non-pharmaceutical alternatives that support ADHD symptoms, especially

inattention. In addition, Fenesi said most research has examined how chronic, long-term engagement of these behavioral interventions can help. There hasn't been any research that compares the effectiveness of physical exercise and mindfulness meditation to one another—until now.

"We also wanted to compare these two behavioral approaches to see if one was superior to the other, or whether they each contributed differently to unique aspects of well-being," she said.

Researchers worked with two community clinics in London, Ont., to recruit children for the study. The children completed three interventions over the course of three weeks: 10 minutes of exercise, 10 minutes of mindfulness [meditation](#), and 10 minutes of silent reading. Before and after each intervention, researchers assessed their cognitive functioning and psycho-emotional well-being.

The researchers found [mindfulness meditation](#) helps [inhibitory control](#), working memory and task-switching, while acute exercise helps children with their psycho-emotional well-being, such as developing a positive mood.

"Our study highlights how the mind and body are connected," Fenesi said. "In order to activate children's intellectual minds, their bodies and mindful awareness must be activated to create an environment that's conducive to learning."

**More information:** Hannah Bigelow et al, The Differential Impact of Acute Exercise and Mindfulness Meditation on Executive Functioning and Psycho-Emotional Well-Being in Children and Youth With ADHD, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.660845](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.660845)

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