How can exercise help you work through stress?

- Exercise boosts mood by decreasing cortisol (the stress hormone) and increasing endorphins (feel-good chemicals).
- Breathing and repetitive movement, can contribute to feelings of tranquility.
- Exercise provides an outlet to work out frustration and anxiety. If cortisol is already in your system, work up a healthy sweat to remove stress-induced toxins in your body and feel better faster!
- Exercise can take your mind off your stressors and give you a sense of control, confidence, and groundedness in the present moment.
- Exercise can strengthen your immune system to better fight colds and other minor illnesses that can affect your stress levels in the future.
- Exercise lowers blood pressure.
- Both cardio and slower forms of exercise help to improve self-esteem, relaxation, resilience, sleep quality, and overall mental health.

What's the best exercise for reducing stress?

There's no one best exercise to help reduce stress. To help you get started, think about these questions:

- Do you prefer to exercise alone, with a friend, or in a group?
- Does the gym appeal to you, or would you rather be outside?
- Would it help you to be accountable to someone else?
- Will you get bored if the exercise is too easy or give up if it is too hard?
- Do you prefer variety or a set routine?

What's the best time of day to exercise?

Figure out what time of day is best and most practical for you (if you struggle to wake up, scheduling an early morning run may be setting yourself up to fail!)

Any time of day you can fit working out into your schedule is the best time. People who exercise at any time of day report better exercise than those who did not.

Schedule your workout – if you wait until you "feel like it," you might be waiting a long time!
How much exercise do I need to be healthy?

Before making a decision about how much exercise you need and how often you need it, have an idea of your goals. Are you exercising for:

- fitness?
- weight control?
- stress management?
- all of the above?

For general health and well-being, aim for:

- 20 minutes of vigorous exercise at least 3x/week (sweating, breathing heavily) (75 minutes is optimal, according to the CDC)
- OR
- Strength training at least 2x/week
- 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least 5x/week (increased heart rate, still able to carry on a conversation) (150 min/week)

If you struggle to fit working out into your schedule, even moderate exercise in 10-minute chunks can lead to health benefits.

Need more ideas? Check out the CDC’s physical activity recommendations online: [www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity)

Campus Resources

Unsure about the best way to start exercising? Sign up for one of the many free BearFit classes located in the Sumers Rec Center or look into a free fitness consultation with a BearFit trainer who will help you find what you’re looking for in your exercise, answers questions, discuss nutrition, and set you up for success.

For more information, contact: Meghann Feely, Assistant Director of Fitness and Wellness at the Sumers Recreation Center (meghannfeely@wustl.edu).

**Habif Health and Wellness Center**
Medical Services: 314-935-6666
Mental Health Services: 314-935-6695
Health Promotion Services: 314-935-7139

**Visiting Us**
Habif is on the lower level of Dardick House on the South 40 on Shepley Drive.
The Zenker Wellness Suite is in the Sumers Recreation Center (room 303).

habit.wustl.edu  rec.wustl.edu