

# MIND YOUR HEAD



## EXERCISE AND MENTAL HEALTH

How does exercise improve mental health? One theory for some of the benefits of exercise include the fact that exercise triggers the production of endorphins. These natural opiates are chemically similar to morphine. They may be produced as natural pain relievers in response to the shock that the body receives during exercise.

Exercise has also been found to increase levels of "brain-derived neurotrophic factor" (BDNF). This substance is thought to improve mood, and it may play a role in the beneficial effects of exercise. BDNF's primary role seems to be to help brain cells survive longer, so this may also explain some of the beneficial effects of exercise on dementia.

The bottom line is that most of us feel good after exercise. Physical exercise is good for our mental health and for our brains. Someday we will understand it all better -- but we can start exercising today

