

Exercise, Sleep, and Physical Wellbeing: They play an essential role in health, happiness, and daily energy.

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Adapted from [Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements](#) (Gallup Press)

Even using conservative estimates, the majority of us do not get enough exercise. Just 38% of people we studied report that they have exercised or had a lot of physical activity in the past day. Among 400,000 Americans we surveyed in more depth, only 27% get the recommended 30 minutes or more of exercise five days per week.

People who exercise at least two days a week are happier and have significantly less stress. In addition, these benefits increase with more frequent exercise. We found that each additional day of exercise in a given week -- at least up to six days when people reach a point of diminishing returns -- continues to boost energy levels.

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A recent experiment revealed that just 20 minutes of exercise could improve our mood for several hours *after* we finish working out. Researchers monitored participants who rode a bike at moderate intensity and another group who did not exercise. Those who exercised for just 20 minutes had a significant improvement in their mood after 2, 4, 8, and 12 hours when compared to those who did not exercise.

As a Mayo Clinic publication stated: "A lack of energy often results from inactivity, not age." On days when you don't have 20 or 30 minutes to exercise, a mere 11 minutes of lifting weights has been shown to increase metabolic rate, which helps you burn more fat throughout the day. *Any* exercise is better than an entire day with no vigorous activity.

The best time to exercise

It might seem counterintuitive, but one of the best ways to combat fatigue is by exercising. We might use being too tired as an excuse to avoid working out, but that's the worst time to skip exercise. A comprehensive analysis of more than 70 trials found that *exercising is much more effective at eliminating fatigue than prescription drugs* used for this purpose. This study also found that nearly everyone, from healthy adults to cancer patients and those with chronic disease conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, benefits from exercise.

One of the primary reasons people exercise regularly is because it makes them feel better about themselves and their appearance, and it boosts their confidence. If you exercise today, you are more than twice as likely to feel physically attractive *tomorrow*.

Feeling attractive is not just important for our self-confidence. Researchers at Columbia University found that our psychological perceptions of our body image could be as important as objective measures like body mass index (BMI).

There is no age limit to having good exercise habits or thriving Physical Wellbeing. Dave, who is 88, responded with an exuberant "no" when we asked him if he had any health problems that prevent him from doing things other people his age can normally do. Dave reports that he has no daily pain. Perhaps it's because he gets up at 6:00 every morning, takes a long walk, does his own yard work and home repairs, and regularly fixes things for his children. As Dave put it, "I keep busy. And I read. I have a computer. I use it, because if you don't use all of your organs in your body, including your brain, you won't feel good."

While Dave is retired and doesn't travel as much as he used to, he still goes to annual golf outings with his friends and plays several rounds a year. Each day, he does 30 minutes of vigorous exercise in addition to his walks. He then adds at least 10 to 12 minutes a day doing stretching exercises. Even at 88, Dave feels great physically and has a good deal of confidence in his appearance. When we asked Dave what his doctor would say about the way he manages his health, he told us that he had just visited the doctor the day before, who enthusiastically said, "Whatever you're doing, just keep doing it!"

Sleep: your daily reset button

Along with regular exercise, sleep plays an essential role in our Physical Wellbeing. To study the value of quality sleep, we conducted an experiment that tracked the effect of a full night of sleep (or lack thereof) on the following day. People who felt irritable before going to sleep and then had a good night's sleep had above-average moods the next morning and afternoon. In contrast, for those who were in a good mood at the end of the day but did not get the right amount of sleep, their mood levels dropped to average, and they were more likely to feel irritable the next day.

Getting a good night's sleep is like hitting a reset button. It clears our stressors from the day before. Even if we have a bad day, getting a sound night of sleep gives us a fresh start on the next day. It also increases our chances of having energy and high wellbeing throughout the day.

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