

A Look Inside The Brain During Exercise

There seems to be no end to the benefits of exercise. Humans need to move or else fall victim to what is often referred to as the sitting disease. If the majority of your day is spent sitting, your overall health will suffer, it can lead to weight gain, heart disease, and other serious chronic illness, especially as you get older. Lack of movement can lead to heart attack, stroke, and a general loss in quality of life in our senior years.

Everyone agrees that exercise is physically great for the body. However, did you know that exercise also has a wide variety of benefits for the human brain? What exactly happens in our brains when we exercise to have such an impressive effect on our mental health?

What Actually Happens In The Brain During Exercise

Exercise causes our heart pressure to rise, which sends a signal to the brain that the body is under stress. In response, a protein is released into our body called “brain-derived neurotrophic factor” (BDNF). This protein is thought of as a “reset switch” – it repairs memory neurons, making thoughts seem crystal clear after exercising and putting the body at ease.

Simultaneously, endorphins are released into the brain, which are meant to limit the degree of pain and discomfort associated with exercise, even creating a sense of euphoria. Like BDNF, endorphins are released in response to the feeling of “stress” brought on by exercise. The term, “runner’s high” is the coin phrase used to describe the surge of endorphins during exercise that act as a natural anti-depressant.

The same antidepressant-like effect from a “runner’s high”

results in a reduction in stress level hormones. Additionally, a study conducted in Stockholm showed that running stimulates cell growth in the hippocampus, which is the portion of the brain responsible for memory and learning.

How Our Mind And Body Are Affected

Together, BDNF and endorphins give us a “happy” feeling after exercise. These are somewhat addictive in nature, which is one reason why some people seem obsessed with exercising, although this “addiction” can be a healthy one.

Besides the short-term high from endorphins and BDNF, exercise also has long-term benefits. Studies show that people are happier and more productive throughout the day when they exercise. A Penn State research study showed that people who had worked out within the previous month were happier and more productive at work compared to those who had not exercised (but not quite to the same degree as those who had worked out earlier that day). People who exercise regularly have much better moods than those who don't and retain a stronger sense of calmness throughout the day.

Exercise affects the brain on various fronts. Not only does it increase heart rate that pumps more oxygen to the brain, it also facilitates the release of various hormones that provides a nourishing environment for the growth of brain cells.

Research conducted at UCLA showed that working out stimulates the growth of new neuronal connections in a variety of important cortical areas of the brain.

How To Maximize The Benefits

20 Minutes

Based on this information, you might think that professional athletes are the happiest people on the planet. According to research conducted by the Department of Exercise Science at

the University of Georgia showed that only 20 minutes of exercise is needed to reach that peak level of productivity, positive mood, and facilitates information processing and memory functions. The key is to turn it into a habit.

Mental And Physical Connection

There is an important mental and physical connection that can increase the benefits of exercise. For example, exercise that integrates different parts of brain activity, such as ballroom dancing that requires rhythm, strategy, coordination and thoughtfulness in movements stimulates cognitive health more than less complex workouts like running or cycling that do not necessarily engage diverse mental abilities.

Adding Exercise To Your Life

Working out in the morning before work or school helps to spike brain activity, prepares you for stresses you may incur during your day, allows for increased retention of new information and learning, and equips you to cope with complex situations that may arise.

Start-off easy – even just 5-10 minutes a day – and gradually increase the length and intensity of your workout. Going to a group or class at the gym makes exercising more fun, and it's a great way to learn new techniques and to meet new fitness minded people.

However, getting motivated to go to the gym regularly can be a challenge, so try different exercises at home and outdoors in your neighborhood, such as jogging, biking, strength training, etc. Variety is the spice of life, and the more you vary your routine the better for your motivation and your body.

There are many apps on your smartphone that can provide you with workout sets for all experience levels and even guide you through the exercises. Furthermore, apps like Map My Fitness and Nike enable you to track your progress, which is a great

way to stay motivated as you watch yourself improve.

Final Thoughts

Remember, the health of your mind and body are closely connected, and exercise is one of the best – if not *the* very best – ways to improve mental and physical health in both the long-term and short-term.

The long-term benefits of exercising regularly are immense – reduced risk of disease, improved mental health, stronger body/muscles, reduced stress, improved digestion, improved blood circulation, and much more.

Even just going on a 20-minute daily walk is immensely better for you than staying sedentary. Find a training partner, set a schedule, do whatever you have to do to get those endorphins and BDNF proteins pumping as often as you can!

Power of the Brain in Exercise

Alright, I realize I'm serious behind on some very interesting topics out there, but this [headline from 2003](#) confirmed something I've been wondering lately.

“Exercise has a more powerful impact on the brain than previously thought; may lead to improved treatments for disorders such as spinal cord injury”

I'll summarize the lengthy article, which covered several studies that indicate exercise has a greater impact on the

brain than previously thought.

Exercise goes beyond helping your muscles. Exercising regularly helps reduce symptoms of depression. The increase in blood flow to brain plays a great part in this. This is important not only for the healthy among us, but also for the individuals recovering from vascular injuries and trauma and must spend significant time in bed.

The article shares findings from several experiments, in which mice, Macaque monkeys, or humans performed various exercises.

Cleveland Clinic Foundation's study found that when elderly patients put mental focus on the exercise they performed, they became 15% stronger, as compared to the group that only exercised who gained 3% strength.

An [earlier study, also lead by Dr. Guang Yue](#), showed that people who performed mental workouts only (no physical movement), were measured to be 13.5% stronger than their counterparts who did no such thinking. The power of our brains is amazing.

The doctors involved believe that this is a big deal for patients who have long roads of physical therapy ahead of them. They predict that recovery times will be faster using this technique.

There is a particular interest in looking at the recovery from spinal cord injuries, as approximately 11,000 people in the U.S. yearly sustain a spinal cord injury.

One of the mice studies showed that mice who were given access to (flat-surface) running wheels before a spinal cord injury (I know, science, right?) reached a higher level of walking compared to their neighbors who did not have the running wheel in their cage before the spinal injury. Next study for them is to watch the recovery time with a running wheel *after* the spinal surgery.

The of the researchers in a University of California-Irvine study, Carl W. Cotman, PhD, said, “Translated into human terms, it means that individuals who are appropriately physically active may be able to protect themselves from depression – or be less depressed or relieved from depression – if they are physically active.”

Another study at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center showed that patients who incorporated exercise into their recovery saw a greater reduction in the symptoms of major depression than those who relied on medication alone.

The article also mentions a University of California-Irvine study (this is the macaque monkey one) that “demonstrated that regular aerobic exercise increases the number of capillaries in the motor cortex, a small area on the outer part of the brain that controls voluntary muscle movements.” The increased volume of capillaries leads scientists to believe the brain can help heal itself, inspires further research to see how exercise might help reduce the effects of aging, and increase recovery rates in patients of all types.

So when you are out walking, running, or inside lifting weights or even yoga, you might put some mental effort into your movements if you want to get stronger. Or if you are stuck in an airplane for many hours, try closing your eyes and imagining yourself performing your favorite exercise. I’m sure you can’t build your muscles mentally overnight, but these list of studies sure gives hope that our minds can put us in the direction of healing bodies!

Your Fitness Friend: The Medicine Ball

I love my home gym. It isn't terribly fancy, but it is awesome to have most of my favorite workout gear available at any hour. After a few months of CrossFit training, I realized a medicine ball was a must have.

It is so versatile, and you can get many different benefits from various exercises that incorporate the medicine ball. If you don't have a medicine ball in your home gym, or haven't tried one at your local gym, I strongly suggest you pick one up and try one or more of these impactful exercises.

Slams

This one is great if you are having a particularly stressful day. Start by holding the ball over your head and use all your force to slam it into the ground. Squat to pick it up, raise it over head, and slam it again. Do this for three minutes and then take a 30 second break before doing it another three minutes.

Balancing Burpees

In a traditional burpee, you put your hands on the ground and jump back. Using a medicine ball between your hands and the ground means you have to really be able to balance well. Which means you have to have a strong core. Do circuits of 15-20 of these in a row, with a 30 second break in between for 5 minutes.

High-Low Chops

Start by holding the ball over your head with both hands, arms straight and torso twisted to the right. As you bring the ball down towards the floor to the left of your left foot with your arms extended, come into a squat (be sure your knees don't extend out past your toes). Keeping the medicine ball away

from your center of gravity makes this an intense move, so you may want to start out with a lighter ball. Reach the ball up as you twist back to the right. Do this at least 10 times on each side to start, and work your way up to more repetitions.

Cross-Behind Lunge

To cross-behind means to do a squat like a curtsy – with your right foot coming behind and to the left of your left foot. The medicine ball is held in your arms and as you go down for the lunge, you raise the ball up to shoulder height. Come back to stand bringing the ball back down to hip level. Repeat on the other side by lunging your left foot back and to the right of the right foot and bring the ball up to shoulder height, arms still extended. Do this as many times as you can, and hope to feel the healthy burn tomorrow (as sure sign you are doing it right!).

Twister

This one will strengthen your core, and build up those biceps! Start seated on the ground with your legs in front of you, knees bend about 90 degrees. Hold the medicine ball just above your knees and while keeping your arms straight, move the ball to the left of your hips. Bring the ball back to above your knees and then bring it down to the right of your hips. As you twist, concentrate on making it an effective twist to not only build that core strength, but it also helps with digestion. Start with 30 second intervals and build up to 60 seconds at a time.

This short video by [Popsugar Fitness](#) that shows you 5 more exercises to get your whole body fit with just a medicine ball. Happy balling, and be sure to let me know which is your favorite medicine ball exercise!

Walking Ease – Use Google Maps to Track Your Distance

Yoga, running, and lifting weights are the physical activities I most enjoy, but I will always love walking. It is a seriously simple thing to do, and seriously effective in keeping our bodies in good health and good form.

Walking is well known to help strengthen bones and muscles, to improve balance and coordination, it can improve your mood, help you be more creative, burn a few calories, lower blood sugar, and best of all, walking [has been shown](#) time and again to decrease your risk of chronic disease.

Just imagine, walk your way to pain-free joints, reduced risk of cancer, lowered blood glucose and insulin resistance, and probably the best benefit: reduce depression and anxiety. Getting your body moving with just a simple walk (it doesn't have to be a power walk) will make huge long-term benefits in your life!

To maintain a healthy body (and mind!) it is recommended that we walk 10,000 steps each day. That's around 4.5 miles. That's a LOT. Especially if you aren't a particularly fast walker. I think that is part of the challenge... to take that much time each day to break away from the daily stressors in life.

This article isn't meant to be about the benefits of walking, though I can't help referring to them since they are pretty amazing. What I want to share with you, in case you don't already know about this, is the tool freely available at <https://www.google.com/maps> to help you track your walking goals. If you go to this page, it should default zoom into your current location. You can do a right click on your mouse

and a popup window will appear that offers directions to/from here. At the very bottom of that list is the tool **Measure distance**. When you select this, a black ring will appear at the spot where you clicked. Go to another point on the map and click again and a dot will appear. Click one more time to make another dot and you will see a line appear with the distance from starting point to ending point. If you keep putting dots at turn points, you will see the distance add up and will clearly see how many blocks you need to go to get to your 4-5 mile point. If you make a mistake, or decide to take a different street, no worries... just click once on the dot that you want to remove, and it goes away, instantly recalculating your distance.

I really like using this tool before I set out for a run especially so I know which streets to take to make up my mileage. I also really appreciate this tool when I'm walking or running in a city where I don't live, where I don't know the streets so well, so I can get a sense of where I'll be and try to find the more visually interesting route. If you click on the little box at lower left of the map page, where it says "satellite," you can see the terrain as well. This is great for when you want to see some nature along the way as well. You'll see in my screengrab illustration for this post that I was eager to cross as many bridges as possible for this walk. I was also lucky that day to have glorious weather and as it was spring time, I saw many trees blooming, and loved the sound of water rushing under me so often.

A hot tip for those of you with tracking apps: you can pre-plan fun drawings and designs using Google Maps, then set your app to track your route as you walk it. Afterward, you can take a screengrab of the app with the red line in a fun shape over streets. Great social media content right there, folks!

Your measured distance route might take you 10,000 steps, it may take more steps, or maybe you have a way to go to build up to that. See how far you can keep going; continue the positive

impact you are having on your body and mind, and challenge yourself to go a certain distance daily. You will love the results no matter where your map takes you!

3 Yoga Asanas for Stronger Wrists

Some of us have weak wrists. Some of us suffer from carpal tunnel. Yoga can help.

First let me tell you a secret about developing stronger wrists with Yoga. There are several poses that you can use, which I'll explain soon. But first, if you haven't read my post [3 Yoga Poses to Make You Sturdy](#), let me tell you something. The tip that doesn't get talked about enough is: keep intention in your fingers. Your fingers help your wrists bear the impact of supporting the weight of your body. When preparing for wrist poses, spread out each lovely extension as wide as you can, and, like your toes in Tadasana, lift the tips of your fingers and allow the power to radiate from your fingers. If you put intention into sharing the responsibility of the weight, you will lighten your load.

Plank Pose

This is probably the most universal way to gain strength in your wrists. You can do from standard straight legs and back on toe tips and flat hands, or with knees to floor. Variations include side plank and Upward Plank Pose. Hold your version for at least 30 seconds. As you develop wrist and core strength, extend that period to longer times. Work a few minutes of Plank Pose into your day. Even when you are not exercising.

Crow Pose

I don't know about you, but I love this pose. It simultaneously reminds me of the fun I had playing in the yard when I was 7 years old and of how strong it makes me feel right now. I feel empowered knowing I can keep my body quiet in an awkward position. It gives me strength to keep my gaze on that spot just above my head on the floor as I count as many breaths as possible before coming back down, with as much control as possible. Start in a squat and place your wrists directly below your shoulders. Relax into the pose by putting your knees in your armpits, just to do a slight stretch. Then place your knee caps on the back of your triceps as you lean forward slightly. Slowly lift your toes off the floor. If this pose is new to you, you can work to just keep your toes 2-3 inches off the floor. As you gain more strength, your toes can come together a foot off the floor as you maintain a calm, steady breath as you hold yourself in balance on your wrists for an increasing number of breaths.

Handstand

This pose is, of course, not for the faint of heart, but wow, can it make you feel good! Most Yoga teachers don't want you to do a handstand until you are at least into an intermediate level, because it takes an extraordinary control to keep your body in balance during handstand. Normally you are not using the wall, but simply pushing your legs overhead in the middle of the room. But let's start small. Near a wall, start on all fours – hands flat on the floor and toes tucked under with knees on the ground. Then push your knees up and back, as if in downward dog. When you are ready, flip one leg upward, with the other joining the first directly after. Your fingertips should be about 12 inches away from the wall. Once your heels are on the wall, keep your feet parallel to the floor and toes pointed. Keep the intention and the strength in your legs while maintaining a focus on the strength your fingers are providing to the pose. Once you have breathed 10 deep breaths, slowly, with control, bring your feet (legs straight) down to the floor. As you gain strength, keep in the inverted position for an increasing number of breaths. Generally Handstand is done towards the end of a yoga sequence, so if you are working

on Handstand alone, you might want to take a few moments in child's pose at the end to restore your body before you come to stand again.

If you perform these three poses with some regularity, in just a few weeks you will note that your wrists are stronger. And most hopefully the pains you occasionally feel at night or even during the day in your forearms will melt away before long.

Mix It Up, Pumping Up Your Workout at the Gym

Staying motivated is always a challenge. If you have access to a gym, it is helpful to mix up your routine from time to time. Some people want to do something different every time they step foot in a gym, others feel more comfortable using 2-3 machines and that's it. This article will hopefully give you some basics on using new machines, and tips on ways to step up your game if you are already familiar with these machines.

I advocate for mixing up your routine, because, when you do, it sort of confuses your body and it has to work harder to compensate. This means you burn more fat. If you go to the gym regularly, you may or may not be using more than the treadmill and some weights. Consider incorporating equipment like a rowing machine, a stair climber, or elliptical into your regular routine.

Rowing Machine

Rowing machines are amazing because they provide a full-body workout. When you sit down secure the foot holds and set the

resistance low, to 2-3. Keep your back erect and core engaged as your knees are bent and hold onto the handle. Start by pulling back on the handle, then push with your feet to extend your legs (keep knees bent slightly) and, leaning back, keeping your arms strong as you pull the bar up to your chest. Stay there for a moment, then bring your body back, first with your feet, then your arms following. Then do another and another, working your way up to 20 reps in a minute, or more! Keep your focus on your form, and keep all your muscles as tight as possible. You can challenge yourself to do more each minute, and then start to increase the resistance.

Rowing machines burn an impactful ~250 calories in 30 minutes. You work your arms, legs, back, and core muscles all while getting in some cardio. If you are a slightly competitive person, you can keep challenging yourself to do more by the minute. And love the sweat it brings! Added benefit to rowing is that it is a non-weight bearing exercise, which is really helpful to those suffering with arthritis, or stiff joints.

Elliptical

The Elliptical machine is popular at most gyms because it a low impact exercise. You benefit from the movement of running, but your joints aren't slammed the same as when you are running. It is a versatile machine, as you can go forward or backward, you can use your legs and arms, or only your legs, and it is perceived to be easier than running on the treadmill. If you want to use the Elliptical machine for cardio, then work to increase your strides per minute on the machine's screen – you should be aiming to get to about 150 strides per minute if you want to break a sweat.

If you are looking more for toning your thighs, press more forcefully with your heels to work your hamstrings and glutes, and press more forcefully with your toes to tone your quads and the front of your thighs. Your core can get an extra workout if you go hands free and only use your feet to move

the machine. Be sure that your top half is not twisting from side to side. You can help yourself stay steady by keeping your hands on your waist. Once you get the hang of the Elliptical, you can intensify your workout by pushing fast for 60 second intervals throughout your workout. Be sure to add a warm up and cool down to the interval.

Stair Climber

Doesn't really take a scientist to figure out that this machine is a great way to build lower-body strength! Anyone who has walked up 2 or more flights of stairs knows that climbing stairs is not for slouches. The great thing about a Stair Climber is that your leg muscles can get really strong. You are working your glutes, quads, calves, and hamstrings. To get the best results, keep your core engaged, and your spine erect. Keeping your body weight as an active force directly above your legs ensures that they work even harder to keep climbing to... um, nowhere?! If you have to use the handrails, only use them to keep yourself erect, and don't hunch over or you'll miss the full exercise.

Like with the Elliptical, you can target specific muscle groups by switching up how you place your feet on the stairs. If you want to target your quads, push off with the ball of your foot. If you are aiming to target the glutes and hamstrings, put more weight on your heels as you step up.

Because the Stair Climber engages your largest muscles, if you keep up pushing those very active muscles, you end up increasing your metabolism, and you lose weight that much more quickly. Heart pumping cardio plus lower body strength training equals burning more calories while you are working out *and* after you leave the gym, than just a cardio workout alone.

It is pretty obvious how you can take this exercise to the next level. Just increase how fast you climb the stairs. Go from slow climb to normal step to sprinting. In terms of

variations, this is where it gets fun: step up to the side, double step up, or going backwards! If you can find some entertainment in the exercise, your time on it will go that much faster, and you'll be closer to reaping the benefits of increased calorie burn in your sleep.

Some fitness machines offer a fantastically complicated option of selections on a digital interface. Most machines have a "manual workout" mode. If you feel overwhelmed by what to enter, just hit the manual button, and find an up or down arrow to increase (and decrease!) your workout intensity. As you use these machines more often, you will discover various built in workout programs such as Fat Burning, Speed Intervals, Calorie Goal, Heart Rate Zone Trainer. You can try a new program each time you use the machine to discover which is your favorite. If you've already got a routine on one of these machines, please share below what makes it exciting for you!

10 Tips and Tricks to Help Lose Belly Fat

Here are some ideas to get you motivated to lose a few pounds. As always, you have to keep up the positive habits to see positive results. Keep up the good work, and please let me know your most powerful tip or trick in the comments below!

1. Up your Interval Training

It really helps to mix up your routine. If you are a runner, don't always go the same speed or distance. Make some runs

long and slow and others short and quick. Incorporate resistance training into your cardio routine. When you

2. Consume Olive Oil

You probably already know how much I love EV00 from my post [The Many Benefits of Extra Virgin Olive Oil](#). According [to this site](#), consuming 2 tablespoons of olive oil will help “improve your blood pressure, your glucose levels and your good cholesterol.” And when you make it up to 3 tablespoons a day, you will start to see the effect of weight-loss. Use olive oil as part of your salad dressing, and use it in place of butter or margarine in your favorite recipes.

3. Hydrate with water

Seems a lot of people have trouble getting enough water. We don't all need the same amount of water. How much we should drink depends on our activity level, the weather if our activity is outside, and how much we weigh. The recommended formula is to take about 60% of your body weight and drink that many ounces of water daily. If you weigh 150 pounds, you'd need 90 ounces. Don't drink too much, but don't drink too little. One of the benefits of drinking water is that you fill up more quickly and don't need to eat as much.

4. Get enough sleep

Getting enough rest is really important to your body. When we don't get enough sleep, our body produces higher levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, that increases our appetite. Allowing your body to rest calmly will naturally allow that belly to trim down. Another tip to reducing body stress is to keep a regular sleep schedule, even on the weekends.

5. Keep moving

I know, a no brainer, but it is certainly effective. Do small things to start like park at the far end of the parking lot when you go to the grocery store, if you have stairs in your

home, walk up and down them 10 times in a day even if you split it up throughout the day. Go for a walk around the block, or more!

6. Vinegar

Probably by now you've seen an ad for the apple cider vinegar diet. The acetic acid of apple cider vinegar lowers your blood sugar levels, decreases insulin levels, improves metabolism, reduces fat storage, burns fat, and suppresses appetite. <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/apple-cider-vinegar-weight-loss> Apple cider vinegar isn't the only vinegar you can use to benefit your health, but it is certainly is a popular one that is easy to find.

7. Reduce Stress

Basically this is the same issue as not enough sleep, in that high cortisol levels get you off balance. Incorporating meditation, yoga, and light exercise (like walking) into your day can have a massive impact on reducing stress, thus showing up in a slimmer waistline.

8. Don't eat after dinner

This works wonders for many people. One great rule of thumb is not to eat after 8 pm. Allow your body to digest your food before you start eating again in the morning. When your body is resting at night, it isn't able to burn as many calories when you are up and moving, so you give your body a break by not filling it up in the evening before you sleep for 8 hours.

9. Eat smaller meals more often

It is important to keep a reasonable portion if you want a trimmer mid section. Many people like to eat 5 mini meals a day to keep their metabolism active and their stomach organ a moderate size. By eating more frequently your appetite will be suppressed more often, which helps stabilize your blood sugar, thus providing the slim factor.

10. Drink green tea

The beneficial components of green tea are its flavonoids and caffeine. These help elevate your metabolic rate and increase fat oxidation (you burn fat quicker than normal). Green tea is also rich with antioxidants that help boost your brain and keep you healthy. Incredibly, studies have shown it also has an impact in helping our bodies fight and prevent cancer. Green tea supplements are also available for those of you who don't care for the taste of green tea.

3 Yoga Poses to Make You Sturdy

There are so many good things we can do so simply, and for free, for our bodies and mind. Yoga is one of them. It doesn't matter if you are super athletic, or barely get off the couch, you can do yoga poses.

This morning during my own practice, it occurred to me that yoga can be so simple. My earliest days of practice was in the Ashtanga tradition, so I knew asanas to be rigorous and make me sweat.

Taking time to appreciate each pose and how your body interprets the movement is of course important. In just a few minutes, you can do these three poses and your day will be brighter and you will be stronger. Another good habit.

Tadasana/Mountain Pose

If you are just starting out, step up from the couch, and

simply stand erect in Tadasana. This is Mountain Pose. Stretch your shoulders back and lift your heart. Tuck in your sacrum (that's the little triangular bone at the end of your spine) just slightly, and keep your core engaged. Your thighs should also be engaged.

A trick to ensure you are really standing steady is to lift your toes, just standing on the base of your foot. If you can keep your balance here, sway just a little to feel the strength within you. Then go back to keeping your mountain firm. Stretch your toes out and place them down, ideally with each toe standing on its own, not touching another.

Your arms are also firm and straight, some teachers say erect fingers touching, others say give each finger some room (like the toes). Be here and breathe for 5-10 deep inhale and exhalations.

Tadasana

- Improves posture
- Strengthens thighs, knees, and ankles
- Firms abdomen and buttocks
- Relieves sciatica
- Reduces flat feet

Downward Dog/Adho Mukha Svanasana

The most iconic yoga pose is Downward Dog. Basically, if you can make a big upside down V with your body, you are doing it. The main idea is to keep your back and legs straight, but relaxed. Like Tadasana, your whole body is engaged.

A good way to get into the pose is from being on hands and knees. This way you can get a proper alignment. Make sure your knees are directly under your hips and your hands are slightly forward of your shoulders. Index fingers parallel, but the

other fingers spread wide. Tuck your toes under and bring your hips up.

As you extend your knees, keep your heels high off the floor, but work towards getting them close to the ground. Make sure your sitting bones are extending toward the ceiling. Keep your shoulders back, and core engaged.

Breathe deeply and keep a gentle gaze on your belly button. If you feel your neck straining to do that, gaze instead between your knees or toes.

Downward Dog, adho mukha svanasana

- Calms the brain and helps relieve stress and mild depression
- Energizes the body
- Stretches the shoulders, hamstrings, calves, arches, and hands
- Strengthens the arms and legs
- Helps relieve the [symptoms of menopause](#)
- Relieves menstrual discomfort when done with head supported
- Helps prevent osteoporosis
- Improves digestion
- Relieves headache, insomnia, back pain, and fatigue
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, asthma, flat feet, sciatica, sinusitis

Sukhasana

Sukhasana, or easy pose, is basically meditation pose. Sit cross-legged and put your hands on your knees, palms up or down.

If palms up, you might like to touch your index finger and thumb as you cup your hand. This is Jnana Mudra, which creates

an opening effect and allows for a receiving from the divine source.

Universal consciousness is represented by the thumb and individual consciousness is represented by the index finger. Their unity represents the union of divine self with individual self.

As you sit in this posture, with your eyes closed, keep your inner gaze at a spot just above between your eyes. Keep your spine erect, shoulders relaxed, core in, but not forced; the top of your head parallel to the ground.

Breathe slowly and if your mind wanders, you might find some focus by counting 1 to 10 over and over. Stay seated in Sukhasana for as long as is comfortable. Those just starting out might feel a foot fall asleep after 10 minutes or so.

If it is uncomfortable to sit directly on the floor, then find a cushion (small or tall, hard or soft depending on your comfort), or even a chair is fine if the discomfort is too distracting. The more important thing is to keep your spine straight, and your mind calm and focused on nothing. This is *easy* pose, afterall.

[Sukhasana](#)

- Calms the brain
- Strengthens the back
- Stretches the knees and ankles

Looking to get started and want to follow along with a great teacher? Check out Yoga with Adriene's [Foundations of Yoga](#) video series on YouTube! In this video she explains these three poses, and more. Her demeanor will get you off the couch and practice right away with her! You will find so much amazing information!

Did you know that stress, weak digestive system muscles, and physical inactivity can work together to cause constipation? If you are having trouble with this issue, be sure to read the article [Yoga for Constipation: 14 Yoga Poses For Relieving Constipation](#) on Jen Reviews. This sequence of poses, including some powerful twists, will undoubtedly rid your body of toxins and get your system *flowing*!

10 Reasons Why I Run; Running is Just a Fast Walk

There are so many wonderful things about running, or in my case jogging, and I count myself lucky that I have free use of my body. I've always loved to walk around to explore the world around me. Before I got into running, I was doing a lot of fast walking. It wasn't crazy power walking, but I was trying to make the most of the movement.

Once I realized that I could run (seriously, I was one of those people who couldn't run a block!), I stopped walking, though I do love to hike, and really enjoy earth's treasures that abound. I wanted to share a few reasons why I love running so much, and I hope I inspire some of you to pick it up. My guess is you'll like it, too!

1. Gives me a chance to not think

With many activities taking my time, tasks to accomplish, and calls to make, it is nice to just leave it all back at home (or upstairs on the days when I run on the treadmill). When I run outside, I enjoy not talking, not typing, not looking at

the computer. I could probably do the same by just sitting on the back yard patio chair, but running sort of puts me in a trance that allows me to let go of any deadlines or other stresses. Sometimes I try to push away thoughts of work or family to keep a clear mind, but often that time away from my desk allows me to think things through to gain clarity on my next step (pun intended) on what I should do in a situation.

2. I sleep more soundly

I'll admit it. Running is a challenge. It isn't a power walk, though power walks are *also* great for your body and mind. Running knocks me out when I do it right. I relax more and have more restful nights. I find especially when I'm training for a half marathon that I sleep better because I've really exhausted my body and it takes the opportunity to shut down at night.

3. I am happier

I'm not sure if it is because I've pushed myself out the door (or into the basement) and powered through whatever distance was on the agenda, or that I have given myself enough unburdened time to do it, but my day is always brighter after a run. Maybe the sweat build up inside me being let out is where the noted release of endorphins come from (wink).

4. I can do it alone

My schedule allows me to run during the day and I am glad that I can run by myself. I can't always find others to run with at that time, and while I do like to run with my other mother runners and of course my partner Matthew, I love that I have the freedom to do it any time. I don't need a pass, and I'm

not bound to start at a particular hour. Usually the miles fly by much more quickly when you have someone at your side!

5. It makes me stronger

When I get going and maintain a steady practice of running, I see that it makes me stronger in other areas of my life. There is a psychological aspect to running in terms of having to get over a challenge. As I count down the percentage (actually, it is usually fractions) of what distance remains on my run, I get over the seemingly insurmountable and that gives me strength to power through at the end and go for a negative split.

6. It is great for my heart

The World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that adults ages 18 to 64 do at least 150 minutes of a moderate exercise or at least 75 minutes of high-intensity physical activity each week, with a recommendation of added muscle strengthening exercises. Scientists have shown that running can help prevent obesity, type II diabetes, high blood pressure, some cancers, heart disease, stroke.

7. I believe it'll make me live longer

I've read enough studies on heart longevity that show that running or even walking will extend your life. I am pessimistic about how our society is advancing, but I still want to live to the ripe old age of 99. And so, I hope to be walking until then.

8. It boosts my metabolism

I mean, for real. This is probably why most people run. Running burns fat and it burns calories. If you aren't a pig during the week, you will slim right down. One of the huge benefits of running is not having to "diet." I eat as healthy as I can, but I don't worry about eating a little more if I'm hungrier that day, as I know my metabolism is running strong, even when I'm sleeping.

9. It relaxes me

You'd think that sitting on the couch would be more relaxing than going for a run. But seriously, after I get over having to put on the sports bra, I'm 98% of the time happy, ecstatic even, that I made the effort. After the tension of 3-6 miles and a shower, my muscles are relaxed and my mind feels refreshed. This is heightened by the path I jog... trails increase relaxation tenfold.

10. Gives me confidence

If you would ask me, Heather, are you an athlete? I would laugh, as I feel far from it. While I've been running for 3 years, I'm no faster than when I started. Though I've never considered myself an athlete, I own more running pants than jeans or any other pants! The confidence that I gain from running doesn't just come from my steady waistline, but from knowing that I can do a very hard and at times uncomfortable thing to sustain a healthy mind and body. It is why I most recommend running to others.

I would love to hear the reasons why you run. Please share below!

The Concern of Obesity

It wasn't that long ago that I was over 30 pounds overweight. I was a new mom, and loved my son, but early complications during the pregnancy left me less mobile than I had been, and the scale crept up as the months passed. I stopped doing yoga, and didn't take care of my diet. I stayed vegetarian, but wasn't making very healthy choices, carrot sticks began being replaced with spoonfuls of Nutella. Most people know the typical story. As my son started walking and talking, and I realized that my marriage was crumbling, no doubt my diet and exercise suffered. I eventually split from my husband and moved back to the states. It was a difficult road, and it took me some time, but I found my path to get "back to myself."

I made a really small change to start. You've probably read the articles that outline the basic small changes to make to jumpstart a healthier lifestyle. Park your car in the parking spot farthest from the store, take stairs over elevators, stop eating after 8 pm. These were little changes for me to make. The bigger commitment came when I bought and started wearing a fitbit step tracker. It was so motivational to me, seeing the steps increase each day. At 9 pm, when I saw that I was at 7-8,000 steps and seeing that I was so close to the recommended 10,000 steps, I found myself walking around my house after my son went to sleep, and then going up and down the basement stairs to make it to 10 floors a day.

The greater changes happened when I started tracking my food intake. There is a sense of accountability when you admit what you are eating, on an online app or in a notebook. Amazingly, I started to eat healthier when I wrote it down. I no longer craved the chocolatey goodness of nut spread, but instead longed for an apple or another fresh, crunchy, and all-natural

food choice. Again, the motivation came naturally, which made the choices so obviously easy.

Each day I grew stronger, and each day the weight just slipped away. And years later, the weight is still off.

I'm concerned with the growing rate of obesity in our country. It is disturbing to know that according to The State of Obesity (<https://stateofobesity.org/>), the 2015 national average put high schoolers at a 13.3% obesity rate. Nearly 38% of adults in the United States are obese. This is terrible news. Certain states have higher percentages than others. For example, Colorado has the lowest adult percentages, at 22.3% obese, whereas West Virginia and Mississippi are at a staggering 37%! Let's work to bring these numbers down!

With our hectic lifestyles it can be hard to find time to walk even 3,000 steps. But we have to do all we can to make some movement in our lives. Make walking, or biking, or some light weight lifting a priority in your life. Moving for 10 minutes a day will likely inspire you to add another 5 and then 10 minutes as the weeks progress.

Evolve your health in little steps and see big progress over time. You can do it. Be your own advocate for a healthy lifestyle. Incorporate a healthy habit of movement into your life. I promise you, you'll be very happy with the results!