

Make Physical Activity Part of Your Day for Better Mental Health

This year Mental Health Awareness Week (13-19 May) has the theme of Physical Health and Wellbeing.

Belfast Healthy Cities, the World Health Organization (WHO) body in Northern Ireland, is calling on people of all ages to make physical activity an everyday activity to improve their mental wellbeing. WHO statistics show that 1 in 4 people in the community are affected by the most common conditions (depression and anxiety) every year. In its new Public Health Strategy, Health 2020, WHO identifies mental disorders as the second largest contributor to the burden of disease and advocates increasing level of physical activity to address both physical and mental wellbeing.

While we can see the obvious positive physical effects of being active on our bodies, the benefits for our minds are less well recognised. However, there is plenty of evidence that even short periods of physical activity can be an effective way to manage depression and anxiety as it reduces stress, increases our mental alertness, lifts our mood and boosts our self-esteem. Additionally, we also know that mental health is a strong risk factor in many diseases therefore looking after your mental wellbeing also contributes to better physical health.

One way to do it is getting to know your local park. Spending time in green space has a significant positive effect on mental wellbeing and can help relieve stress. You could also take part in a local environmental project or help out at a community garden that will also improve your neighbourhood; not only does this help with getting active, but socialising, building skills and working towards a set goal also help support mental wellbeing. At work, why not try getting out for a walk with your colleagues during lunch break. This is also national Walk to Work Week so it is an excellent opportunity to get started.

Joan Devlin, Chief Executive, Belfast Healthy Cities said

'As these suggestions show getting enough physical activity to see improvements does not have to be expensive or time consuming. By making a few simple changes to our day-to-day routine, we can see twin benefits for physical and mental health. As we head into summer getting out into a local park or even walking home from work in the evening, are simple things everyone can do to improve their mental wellbeing. Organisations from different sectors are increasingly working together to support opportunities for better health. By working together like this we can all achieve better results for all the people of the city.'

Notes

The World Health Organization and the Chief Medical Officer in Northern Ireland both recommend that children (5-17yrs) should take 60 minutes of physical activity every day, while for adults (18-64yrs) and older people (65+) the amount is 150 minutes a week.

Health 2020

http://www.euro.who.int/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/169803/RC62wd09-Eng.pdf

Mental Health Foundation <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/mentalhealthawarenessweek/get-involved/>

Walk to Work Week (Via Living Streets) <http://www.walktoworkweek.org.uk/>