

## Healthy body for a healthy mind during social isolation

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Staying active is critical for maintaining physical fitness during the COVID-19 restrictions but a recent Deakin study shows regular exercise will also deliver important mental health benefits during the current period of social isolation.

Co-author of the study, Dr Megan Teychenne from Deakin University's Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN), said physical activity is well known as a key factor for the prevention and management of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Dr Teychenne's [research](#) found that physical activity, even in low doses, could lower the risk of mental illness and she said it was pleasing to see the Australian Government had recognised the importance of exercise during the COVID-19 crisis.

"Even during these tough restrictions, the Government has allowed exercise as one of only four reasons we can leave the home – clearly demonstrating its value in terms of our physical and mental health," Dr Teychenne said.

"While current physical activity guidelines recommend a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise and two sessions of muscle strengthening exercises per week, our research has shown that for mental health, any activity is better than nothing.

"Mental disorders are already among the leading causes of disease and disability globally. We need to do everything we can, including building in regular physical activity to our days, to maintain mental health while we are isolated."

With gyms and exercise classes now shut down across the country, Dr Teychenne has some tips for building movement into your day:

- Keep motivated by scheduling exercise time in your diary as you would for a gym class.
- Put on your favourite music- a cheerful selection can be found [here](#) - and do simple bodyweight exercises like squats, lunges and push-ups.
- Make use of the great apps and free YouTube videos available to guide your home exercise. These include yoga, high-intensity interval training and dancing. Some gyms are now live-streaming sessions and some apps are offering a free trial period or are free during the current isolation period.
- Get outside into the fresh air if you can. Kick the footy in the backyard with the kids, set up an obstacle course or exercise circuit for you all to try, or go for a 'physically distanced' walk around the neighbourhood early in the morning or later in the evening when fewer people are around.
- Consider hiring a piece of exercise equipment (treadmill, exercise bike, cross-trainer). The starting price is usually around AUD\$120 for 3 months – which works out at around \$10 per week for base models. Alternatively, you could consider buying second hand equipment.

Dr Teychenne said it was important to find something you enjoy doing as you are more likely to stick with it and achieve the mental health benefits.

"The most important thing is to find time every day to move your body – even if it is a couple of laps around the block. Regular exercise will help boost your state of mind and protect your mental wellbeing."

*If you are experiencing any mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, please reach out to one of the various national support services or see [this Beyond Blue link](#) for mental health resources during the coronavirus outbreak.*

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