

## Be active for your mind and your body

Being in good health involves mental as well as physical health. But did you know that physical activity benefits your mind as well as your body?

We know that physical fitness gives us the strength to fight disease or injury. So it makes sense that ‘mental fitness’ gives us the resilience we need to cope with emotional stress.

### How do we measure ‘mental fitness’?

When we are mentally fit, we are able to be creative, learn and take risks. We enjoy the world around us and the people in it. When we want to know about our physical fitness, we can stand on a scale. We can test our endurance, flexibility and muscle tone. But how do we know if we are mentally fit?

We can begin to by understanding the characteristics of good mental health – the ways we react to or deal with events in our daily lives. Here are some of these characteristics:

**Realistic attitude:** Life can sometimes be disappointing, but try to also look on the bright side of things.

**Self-actualization:** Remember what is important to you in life. Focus on your successes and learn from failures.

**Emotional support:** It is important to build close ties with family, friends, and support services in your community.

**Flexibility:** Feel your feelings. Savour joy and laughter. Don't hide from sadness and fear. Talk openly about your feelings.

**Resilience:** Handle stress, anger, and anxiety as best you can. Try not to let negative emotions bring you down for too long.



### Keeping mentally fit in wintertime

Along with snow and chilly temperatures, winter brings Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) to about 2-3% of Canadians. Another 15% suffer from a milder depression known as the ‘winter blues’.

SAD and, to a lesser degree, the ‘blues’, can affect:

- mood
- sleep
- appetite
- energy levels
- concentration.

It is possible to exercise away the blues. Researchers say that physical activity acts as a distraction from the climate. It provides a sense of control over health and body image. And exercise creates opportunities for pleasant social interaction.

### Winter exercise tips

- If you're already active, try to maintain or even increase your level of physical activity in winter.

- If you are not very active, *look here for tips on getting started*.
- Exercise outdoors and during daylight hours. Light improves our mood in winter.
- Do indoors exercises near a window.
- Build activity into your lifestyle. For instance, choose to take the stairs rather than an elevator. On public transit, get off a stop early and enjoy the walk.

## **The benefits of an active mind and body**

Knowing about the components of good mental health helps us to assess our own strengths and weaknesses as we try to improve our mental fitness.

When you make physical activity part of your day, especially in winter, you will have more energy, sleep better, and feel calmer. You'll have a feeling of accomplishment. Best of all, you'll have the confidence to cope better with the stresses and demands of life.

### ***About the Author***

Adapted with permission from the *Alberta Centre for Active Living*. The Centre's mandate is to improve the health and quality of life for all people through physical activity. You can read the full article [www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/chn/feature-articles/](http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/chn/feature-articles/).