

## The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns

### Let's Get Your Mind Back In Shape

from the American Counseling Association

It's the time of the year when many of us get serious about getting our bodies back in shape. After all those holiday treats, we may notice that our clothes are just a wee bit tighter and that we seem out of breath much more often.

But while getting and staying physically fit is a great goal, many of us ignore the idea that we also need to be mentally fit. And just as you can exercise your muscles to get in better physical shape, there are things you can do to reduce stress and get your feelings and attitudes into better shape.

One starting point for shaping up your mental health is simply to make some time for yourself. It's easy in today's busy world to find yourself buried in work, family issues and social obligations, leaving little or no time for yourself.

An easy fix to that is to create a daily schedule that includes a time slot for "you." Actually schedule a time each day when you can do one thing that you find relaxing or enjoyable, then stick to that schedule. When it's "you" time, pick up a book or take that walk and leave the stress behind.

You can also improve mental well-being by doing things outside yourself. When you give something back to others, it can offer a meaningful escape from your own problems while also providing a sense of fulfillment and self-worth that's essential for good mental health. Look for volunteer opportunities with community, civic or religious groups that will give you a chance to do some good for others.

And yes, staying physically active and fit also plays a role in improved mental health. Studies have found, for example, that exercise is a great way to fight depression. And as we get ourselves into better shape we begin to feel more confident about how we look and what we can do -- feelings that add up to good mental health.

Just as those extra pounds from all those holiday cookies are not going to disappear like magic, reducing stress and eliminating problems also takes effort to keep those issues under control. But when you build a little relaxation into your life, reach out to help others, and stay physically fit, you'll find mental health improving, making it easier to cope with the challenges of everyday life.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association.  
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words: 394