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## Movement – A Tune-Up for Your Mind

Your body and mind may be connected in ways you don't even realize. Moods and feelings have a lot to do with how your body is functioning, and movement is a big part of that.

We know that a sedentary lifestyle is bad for physical health, and mental health suffers too when you don't move much. Sedentary lifestyles are linked to a greater risk for anxiety and depression, as well as low self-esteem. Movement and muscle strengthening creates positive changes to your body, and when those changes are passed along to the brain you feel a greater sense of happiness, confidence, and positivity. Simply, the strength you feel in your muscles, then unconsciously signaled to your brain, translates to a sense of strength and confidence in your daily life.

Dancing enhances the brain-body connection and improves emotional awareness. It allows you to take a break from work, family, and everyday stressors. When you dance, rigid emotional patterns can be broken, allowing you to find new ways of thinking, feeling, and coping. Dancing is a creative and fun activity, and you don't have time to obsess over negative things while you are dancing.

Maybe you are one who has never considered dancing due to self-consciousness. If you are self-conscious about dancing, you are not alone! Often, people are afraid they will look foolish. The fact is, most people are too focused on their own dancing and having a good time, rather than watching others. To ease into dancing, practice with a friend or take lessons. Be open to learning if dancing can improve both your physical and mental well-being.

Exercise, specifically resistance training and yoga, can even help with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The more physical activity you do, the more you tend to have a sense of control over your life. This is just one more example of how the brain, body, and mind work beautifully together.

## Does Your Body Feel Stiff?

Feeling stiffness in your body is a common complaint, especially as you age. Stiffness can be a result of doing heavy activity that you are not used to or from being inactive for periods of time. It can also be caused by poor posture or medical conditions. Here is a closer look at causes of stiffness and ways to cope.

**Heavy activity.** When you do strengthening exercises, or perform heavy labor that you are not used to, your muscles can develop tiny tears. This is a normal part of the muscle strengthening process and you may feel stiff and sore for 1 to 2 days as the body repairs itself.

**Inactivity.** You can feel stiffness because you have been inactive. Synovial fluid is a thick liquid located between your joints, and when you move around during the day this liquid lubricates your joints. When you stop moving to sleep or when you sit for long periods of time, the fluid doesn't secrete as much to facilitate joint and bone movement.

**Poor posture.** Sitting or standing for long periods of time and holding your body in a way that places strain on muscles, tendons, and ligaments can leave you feeling stiff and sore.

**Medical conditions.** Rheumatoid arthritis, Lyme disease, thyroid disease, strains, sprains, and possibly low levels of vitamin D are all medical conditions that can cause you to feel stiff. If you think your feelings of stiffness could be due to a medical cause, seek medical attention.

Here are some ways to prevent and treat feelings of stiffness caused by situations other than a medical condition.

- » Warm up your muscles before physical activity. Sometimes, the feeling of stiffness is inevitable and part of the muscle repair process that allows you to get stronger, but a good warm up can certainly help.
- » Take mobility breaks throughout the day. Set a timer and get up and move for about 5 minutes every hour to help increase the secretions of joint fluid and prevent stiffness.
- » Continue to be active. Even though heavy exercise can lead to stiffness, it can also help reduce it. Exercise can help reduce inflammation, increase the secretion of synovial fluid to lubricate your joints, and helps build muscles that support good posture.
- » Take recovery days when you need to. If you have a day of heavy activity and are feeling

stiff and sore later, try light cardio activities like swimming, walking, or cycling.

- » Check your posture, always. Make adjustments to your work space, if needed, so your head, neck, torso and legs are aligned, and keep your computer at eye level with feet flat on the floor.
- » Stretch and increase mobility. Any stretching can be beneficial and stretches should be done every day. Stretching is most beneficial when muscles are already warm, so make sure you do some type of warm up activity first.



## Processed Foods – The Good and Bad

Processed foods are everywhere. The term “processed” applies to food that has been altered from a natural state in any way. Minimally processed foods can have a place in healthy diets. Examples include low-fat milk, precut fresh vegetables, frozen vegetables and fruit, roasted nuts, and whole-grain or breads. Also, milk and juice that has been fortified with vitamin D and calcium, breakfast cereals with added fiber, canned vegetables, and canned fruits packed in water or natural juice can, and should be, part of a healthy diet, especially when fresh versions are not available or affordable.

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Diets that are high in ultra-processed foods have been linked with higher risks of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, excess calorie intake, and weight gain. This is of great concern as nearly 60% of calories consumed in the U.S. are in the form of ultra-processed food.

Ultra-processed foods have gone through multiple processing, like heating, freezing, milling, dehydrating, and blanching. During these processes, the food's structure is changed and often other ingredients are added. You will find ultra-processed foods in every food category and these are appealing because they are ready to eat, affordable, and tasty. Examples of ultra-processed foods include: packaged snacks, crackers, chips, cookies, pastries, candies, cakes, soda, packaged breads/rolls, sweetened cereals, boxed pasta and rice dishes, deli meats, hot dogs, sausage, instant soup mixes, and frozen ready-to-eat foods like pizza, entrees, side dishes, and desserts.

In today's food environment, it is unrealistic to think you can avoid ultra-processed food entirely. Here are some helpful tips:

- » Keep track of how much your diet is made up of these foods and then make a few healthier substitutions each week.
- » When you go to the grocery store, shop the perimeter. The center isles are likely to contain ultra-processed foods.
- » Prepare meals at home more often and use whole, unprocessed foods. Become an informed consumer and know what you are eating.
- » Read the ingredient list on food labels and look for added sugar, fat, and salt; substances that are not typically found in a kitchen like hydrogenated oils, colors, emulsifiers, thickeners; and chemical-sounding names you can't pronounce. These are good indicators that the item is probably ultra-processed.

This recipe for Greek Green Beans could be a healthful substitution for the popular Green Bean Casserole made with ultra-processed ingredients. For comparison, the traditional Green Bean Casserole has twice the calories and fat, and almost four times as much sodium as the Greek Green Beans.

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## Greek Green Beans

Makes 6 Servings

### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion halved and sliced thin
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 lb. fresh tomatoes, diced
- 1 lb. fresh green beans, trimmed
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- Juice of one lemon
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill or 1 teaspoon dried dill

### Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Rinse produce by gently rubbing under cold running water; prepare produce as directed.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil in a large pot or dutch oven. Sauté the onion in the oil over medium-high heat for about 5 minutes, until softened and starting to brown.
4. Add the garlic and sauté for another minute.
5. Add the tomatoes and stir together. Continue to cook for about 2 minutes, until the tomatoes soften.
6. Add the green beans, water, salt, and black pepper. Stir to distribute the ingredients. Turn the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes, or until green beans are tender to your liking. Stir occasionally.
7. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice and dill. Serve immediately and refrigerate any leftovers.

**Notes:** Frozen green beans can be used and require less cooking time. You can also substitute a 15-ounce can of diced tomatoes for fresh tomatoes. Add diced potatoes for a heartier dish or serve these green beans and juices over rice.

**Nutrition Information per serving:** 80 calories; 4.5 g fat (0.5 g saturated fat ); 10 g carbohydrates; 2 g protein, 3 g fiber; 180 mg sodium; 5 g sugar.

