

# Physical fitness improves mental health too

Even small changes can have a big  
impact on your well-being





**M**ost of us, when we think about exercise, think of it as a way to improve our physical fitness, look better and help prevent conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. But, over the last ten years, a growing body of compelling evidence points to physical exercise having beneficial effects on mental health, cognitive abilities and an overall sense of greater well-being.

For instance, when researchers at Bristol University in the UK studied 200 people at their university and two private companies, they found employees performed significantly better on days they exercised.<sup>1</sup>

For those reading a printed version of this PDF, head to [aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/fit-for-duty-corporate-wellness](https://aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/fit-for-duty-corporate-wellness) to access the fitness-related articles.



**72%**

**More efficient time management**



**79%**

**Improved mental skills**



**74%**

**Better managed workloads**



**Many study participants even report smoother interactions with colleagues and increased job satisfaction.**

The bottom line is that there's lots of evidence to suggest that physical exercise can lead you to enjoy a greater sense of overall well-being now and well into your future. But, with hectic work schedules and busy home lives, how does one find the time to exercise?

We've put together a few tips to help you incorporate more movement into your daily routine. Whether you're working, travelling or running errands, it's easier than you might think to get your heart pumping and feel the positive

physical and mental benefits of exercise. Here are some simple ways to improve fitness no matter where you are.

## Keep it real

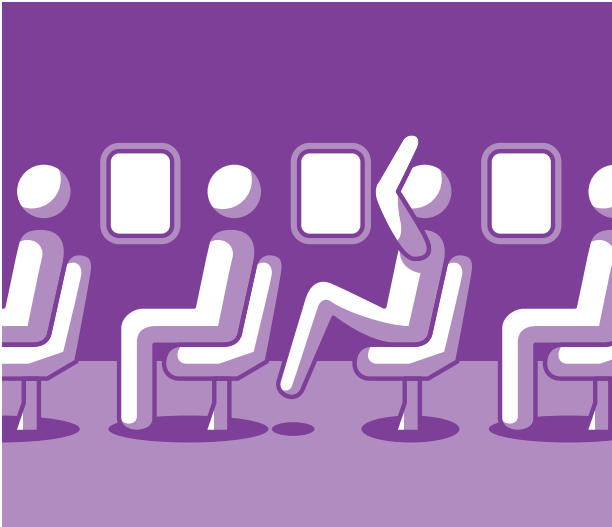
Whether your current fitness levels mean you occasionally swim or walk but would like to up your exercise to strengthen your heart and ease your anxiety, or whether you comfortably run marathons but have your sights set on a triathlon, remember everyone's fitness levels and goals are different. Whatever you'd like to achieve, be realistic about your goals and time periods for achieving them. Start small and build your fitness and confidence over time.

## You've got to work it

**Sitting at your desk hunched over your computer all day takes a toll on your body and mind. To combat this:**



- 1** Try getting up from your desk and taking a walk outside for lunch. You'll be re-energised when you return to your desk.
- 2** Even if you can't get outside, a simple [seated stretch](#) can help. Try sitting towards the front of a chair with your feet flat and hands resting on your knees. Inhale and roll your hips forward, lifting your chest upwards. Hold this position for 10–15 seconds. Then exhale and roll your hips backwards, rounding your shoulders and lowering your chin towards your chest. Now hold this position for 10–15 seconds. Repeat 5–10 times.
- 3** To work your lower body, try this [desk-friendly leg exercise](#) that works your core muscles, too.
- 4** Even actions like standing up at your desk, doing some [knee presses, hugs and shoulder shrugs](#) can have a positive effect.
- 5** Try taking the stairs instead of the lift.
- 6** Or use a toilet that's farther away from your desk.
- 7** Stand up when you're on the phone or, better yet, walk over to someone's desk to speak with them rather than calling or emailing them.

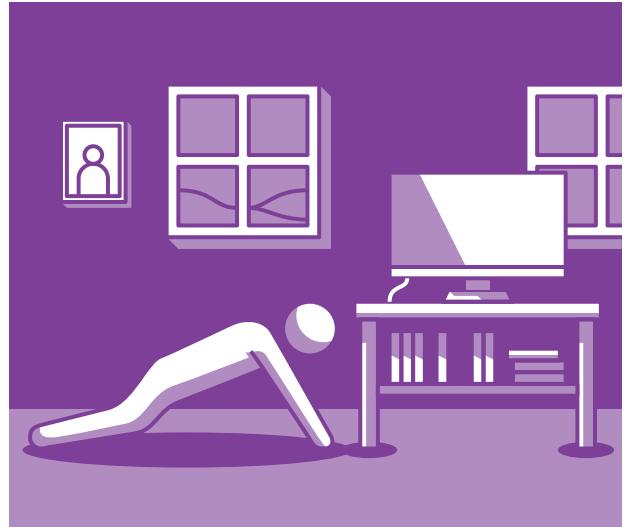


## On the road again

Travel days don't have to be sedentary.

- 1 When you're waiting in line to check-in for a flight or you've pulled off the road to take a bathroom break, march in place for 1-3 minutes while swinging your arms as you would if you were walking. This combination of movements warms up your body by slowly increasing your heart rate and pumping blood to your muscles.
- 2 If you're on a plane or train, try this [seated exercise](#) to engage your abdominal muscles and inner thighs.

“Ask your employer what health and wellness services are available to you, either through your Aetna health and wellness plan or directly through your employer”



## Be a home body

Do you work from home? Or perhaps you're travelling for business without access to a hotel gym or pool. Here are some exercises you can do almost anywhere.

- 1 Push-ups are a great exercise because they engage almost every muscle in your body.
- 2 If push-ups are too difficult, try a modified version. Stand facing a wall with your feet shoulder-width apart. Place your hands on the wall, positioning them slightly wider than your chest. Keeping your abs tight, bend your elbows and lean your chest toward the wall. Then press back out. Start with a few sets of 8-10 repetitions and build up to 12-15 repetitions.
- 3 You can also try [standing hip extensions](#) which will work your glutes and can also improve your balance.



## Make the most of your health and wellness benefits

Your employer has made a significant investment in your health and well-being by offering you a high-quality, comprehensive health care plan. Make sure you're taking advantage of all the great programs and resources built into it. Ask your employer what health and wellness services are available to you, either through your Aetna health and wellness plan or directly through your employer.

Find out if you can take time during your working day to exercise (even if you need to make up the time in some way, such as eating lunch at your desk). You and your employer will reap the benefits. Remember, you're not abandoning work. On the contrary, you're ensuring the hours you put in have value.



## Make it a lifestyle

There's so many ways to infuse exercise into your life and daily routine. The key is to make it a permanent part of your lifestyle. Juggling a busy schedule can be challenging. But working exercise into every part of your life will go a long way toward increasing your physical and mental health today, as well as helping you to avoid diseases in the future. Give it a try and see if it doesn't help improve your overall sense of well-being.

1: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/3793791/Going-to-the-gym-in-a-lunch-break-makes-you-work-better.html>

## You might also enjoy reading

Head to [AetnaInternational.com](http://AetnaInternational.com)'s Explore hub for lots of useful articles about health and wellness, including:

[11 health, wellness, stress and mindfulness techniques you can do in the office](#)

[Fit for duty: how companies are helping improve their performance by improving their workers' fitness](#)

## Need more information?

Our health and wellness library is full of health-related content as well as health care industry insights. If you're moving, working or living abroad and would like more information about private medical insurance and health and wellness benefits, one of our expert consultants would be happy to help you.

[aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore.html](http://aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore.html)



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