

Sport brings people together which positively influences their mental health.

Being part of a club

“People are more likely to confide, ask small favours and obtain support from their sport and recreation clubs.”¹²

Overall, evidence from research indicates that sport brings people together which positively influences their mental health.

This sort of social interaction and support are brought about by a range of sources which can buffer the impact of stress and protect against poor mental health. These can include:

Being a spectator or fan



Participating in sporting teams

Volunteer



To find a club in your local area, visit dscr.wa.gov.au/clubs

How participation in sport and recreation helps you be happy



Mental wellbeing



Social interaction, environment and support



Cognitive function, improved physical health



Reduced obesity and associated health problems.

The next time you're active, note how good you feel afterwards. You'll probably feel happier and calmer too.

Take a tip from the ancient Romans: “**A healthy mind in a healthy body**” — a saying that has gone on to become the motto of many sporting and physical activity groups around the world.

Conclusion — a healthier and calmer mental outlook

Overall, research supports the finding that participating in organised sport and recreation can protect against mental illness and promote positive mental health.



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Mind Matters




A healthy mind in a healthy body:

How playing sport and being physically active improves mental health.

Being part of a team increases a person's social support networks, which can reduce stress, anxiety and depression¹.

It's easy to think the main benefits of sport and physical recreation revolve around fitness - but research shows there are also many benefits which improve mental health.


Physically active individuals report:


-  **Higher levels of wellbeing**
-  **People who belong to a team sport or have better access to sports facilities are generally:**
 -  happier
 -  tend to enjoy better mental health
 -  cope better with the stresses of modern living²


Challenges around getting active

The creation of cohesive social environments leads to improved levels of mental wellbeing and happiness.

According to Australian research, there's an increasing disconnect between people and their neighbourhood, suburb, town or city. It's also recognised that sport and recreation can play a large role in helping state and local government authorities and other community groups help people re-connect. The research says:

 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing³ found almost half the total population (**45.5%**) experience a mental health disorder at some point in the lifetime.

 One in five, or **20%** of the Australian population aged 16-85 years, experienced mental disorders in the previous 12 months (of their survey).

 **4.1 million people** had experienced a lifetime mental disorder but did not have symptoms in the 12 months prior to the survey interview.

Several groups in Australia appear to be more at risk of mental health problems than others. These groups include:

Disengaged youth

In young people, one study found higher levels of depression symptoms during adolescence for those who participated less in moderate physical activity and team sports.⁴

It is important that youth are encouraged to be involved in sport at school. This can protect against poor mental health in early adulthood through fewer incidences of victimisation and bullying.

Different cultures

Different cultural groups engage in sport and active recreation in different ways. There's an urgent need for:

-  **Culturally appropriate programs that include all**
-  **Focus on low-impact exercise⁵**


Ageing population

Being active by joining a club not only helps keep older people agile and healthy, it connects them, helps with making new friends and keeps the mind engaged.

As we age, ABS statistics⁶ indicate that involvement in organised sport and physical activity declines.

 Australians aged 55-64 and 65 years and over had the lowest rate of participation (18% and 17%).

 Lowest involvement in all aspects of sport and recreation overall (19% and 18% respectively).

 Results indicate a significant change in participation levels and, potentially, a corresponding decline in the mental health benefits from participating in physical activity.

Pressure to perform

The everyday stresses of life – wanting to do our best, looking for a new job, moving house, grieving for a loved one – all add to the pressure to perform, particularly when playing team sports.

Benefits of being active

Mind matters

Participation in organised sport and recreation can protect against mental illness and promote positive mental health.

Researchers believe that participating in sport and recreation and group-based physical activities is the glue that binds people together.⁷

-  Community connectivity is linked to people's level of general and mental health.
-  Studies show that membership in sports, hobbies, recreation or cultural groups support positive mental health.⁸
-  Participation in groups involving people from diverse backgrounds is associated with better health in both men and women.⁹



Connected communities

Promoting the social, physical and mental wellbeing benefits of being active in a community helps create social cohesion, especially amongst disadvantaged groups.

People who belong to a team are generally happier¹⁰ and experience fewer psychological difficulties.¹¹

Safer streets

Playing sport locally or regularly walking your dog in the neighbourhood park helps you get to know your community and the people who live there.

The more you do this the more ownership you take of your area which leads to a positive relationship with your streets.

With this, comes with a feeling of being safer and in turn creates more positive emotional and behavioural wellbeing.

Brain boost

Research confirms being active in the playground, on the court and on the field helps learning in the classroom.

It points to more physically active children being smarter because exercise has biological, psychological and social benefits – it improves memory, behaviour, motor skills, concentration and reasoning.

Doing school sport during adolescence was a statistically significant predictor of:

-  **Lower depression symptoms**
-  **Lower perceived stress**
-  **Higher self-rated mental health in young adulthood**

¹ Downward & Rasciute, 2011; Kraemer & Marquez, 2009; Sabiston et al., 2013
² Downward & Rasciute, 2011; Huang & Humphreys, 2012; Wann, Martin, Grieve, & Gardner, 2008.
³ ABS 4326.0 - National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2007.
⁴ Sabiston et al., 2013

⁵ Heath et al. (2006); (Heath et al., 2004). Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services
⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015.
⁷ Anaby et al., 2014; Wann & Weaver, 2009
⁸ Hamano et al., 2010.
⁹ Iwase et al., 2012.

¹⁰ Donaldson & Ronan, 2006; Huang & Humphreys, 2012
¹¹ Asztalos et al., 2012; Vella et al., 2014