Move More in May: Five Reasons to Increase Physical Activity

In many parts of the country, the month of May is when the weather warms after a cold winter. That means it’s time to get up and move more! Whether it’s more walks outside, push-ups during commercials on TV, more stairs in your house, or getting up and walking regularly at work, the benefits of physical movement are endless. And while we all know we should exercise more because it’s good for us, sometimes we need a boost and a goal to help us get going. This doesn’t mean you need to go to the gym or buy fancy workout clothes, you just need to move your body more – and if you haven’t started already, May is the perfect time!

Here are five reasons to increase physical activity and move more in May.

1. Moving your body improves mental health. Studies
continue to show that when our bodies feel good, our brains feel better. The results of 40 clinical trials involving nearly 3,000 patients with a variety of medical conditions showed that those who exercised regularly reported a 20% reduction in anxiety compared to those who didn’t exercise. Others found that even small doses of physical activity, such as brisk walking, may substantially lower the risk for depression. Studies show the greatest benefits are realized when going from no activity to at least some activity, but the truth is, every little bit helps.

2. **Exercise is awesome for your physical health.** It should come as no surprise that more and more doctors prescribe exercise to help patients improve their physical health. Exercise strengthens your heart and improves circulation. The increase in blood flow raises oxygen levels, which lowers your risk for heart disease, high cholesterol, and lowers blood sugar levels. Of course, it also helps you control your weight, strengthens bones and muscles, reduces risk of falls for older adults, and even reduces your risk of some cancers, including colon, breast, uterine, and lung cancer. It’s time to move!

3. **Exercise curbs your craving for junk food.** Research suggests physical activity can help promote a better diet. As little as 20 minutes of brisk walking has been shown to help control high-calorie junk food and soda cravings and even motivate the selection of healthier foods. Exercise can actually increase prefrontal brain functioning, which improves our ability to resist the temptation of sugary or salty, ultra-processed foods.

4. **Move more, sleep better.** Have trouble falling or staying asleep? Try moving more! While researchers may not completely understand how physical activity improves sleep, decades of studies show that moderate aerobic exercise increases the amount of deep sleep we get,
which is when the brain and body rejuvenate. And the best part? It doesn’t take months or years to see the benefit – exercise today and sleep better tonight. Scientists suggest watching what time you exercise since aerobic exercise raises the core body temperature and releases endorphins, which might make it difficult to wind down if you exercise in the evening.

5. **Exercise your way to better relationships.** Physical activity causes a release in endorphins, which are feel-good hormones that block out pain. As a result, people feel happier after exercising, even after a single 20-minute walk. It can also decrease stress and worry, which can reduce the odds of negative interactions and lead to boosts in empathy, positivity, and compassion. Exercise also helps remove toxins in our bodies, which affect how we feel, and how we feel impacts our relationships. Plus, studies suggest that exercise increases testosterone, and women who are physically active have greater sexual desire, arousal, and satisfaction. In sum, exercise can increase our emotional connection with others.

So, it’s time to commit to move more in the month of May. Start by setting a specific, realistic goal. Write it down, commit, share it, and celebrate your small wins. You may even reach out and get moving more with a partner or friend, and you will both reap the benefits!