



# FALL WEEK 7

Promoting Physical Activity and Fruit & Vegetable Tracking with a Fun Team Support Environment and Friendly Competition

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## 5 MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

Source: Walden University

### The Psychological Benefits of Exercise

Most of us know the many physical benefits of exercise: weight control, lower blood pressure, reduced risk of diabetes, and increased energy, just to name a few. But what about the psychological benefits of exercise? From easing symptoms of depression and anxiety to keeping your memory sharp, there's no shortage of mental benefits of exercise. Whether you need motivation to get to the gym or to just take a brisk walk, the five psychological benefits of physical activity below will have you tying up your shoe laces and heading out the door.

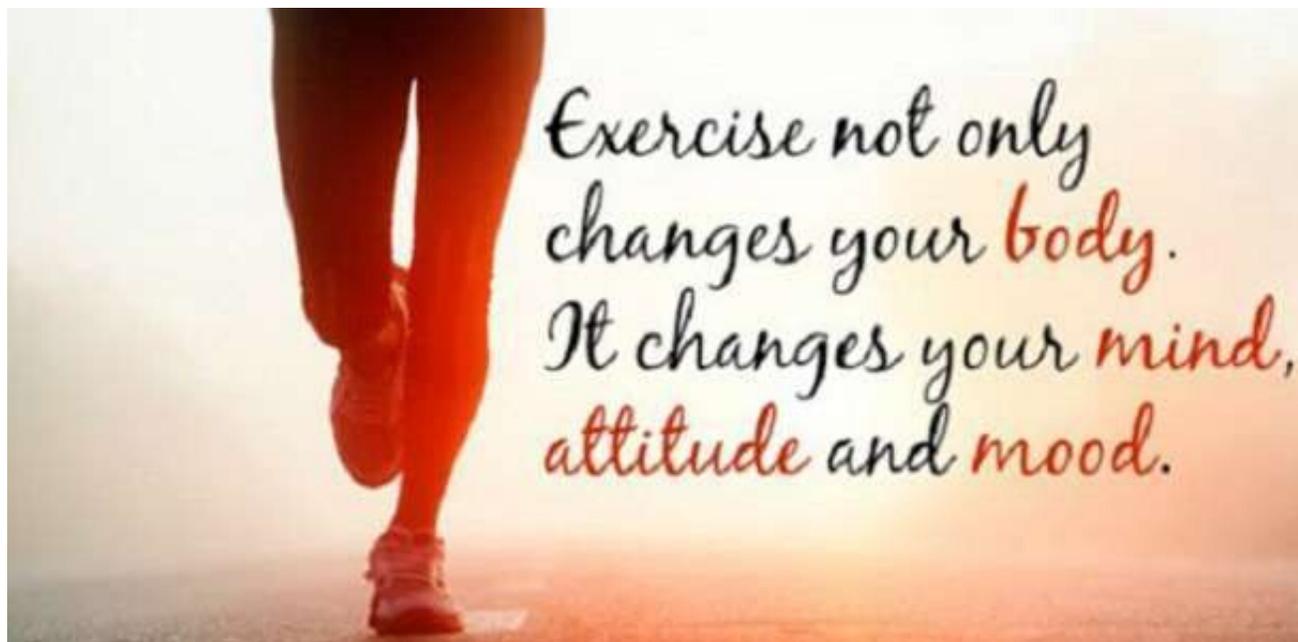
1. **Help for depression and anxiety.** Exercise is a scientifically proven mood booster, decreasing symptoms of both depression and anxiety. Physical activity kicks up endorphin levels, the body's famous "feel good" chemical produced by the brain and spinal cord that produces feelings of happiness and euphoria. Even just moderate exercise throughout the week can improve depression and anxiety, so much so that some doctor's recommend trying out an exercise regimen for these conditions before turning to medication.
2. **Decreased stress.** Another mental benefit of exercise is reduced stress levels - something that can make us all happier. Increasing your heart rate can actually reverse stress-induced brain damage

by stimulating the production of neurohormones like norepinephrine, which not only improves cognition and mood but improves thinking clouded by stressful events. Exercise also forces the body's central and sympathetic nervous systems to communicate with one another, improving the body's overall ability to respond to stress.

3. **Increased self-esteem and self-confidence.** From improving endurance to losing weight and increasing muscle tone, there's no shortage of physical achievements that come about from regular exercise. All those achievements can all add up to a whopping boost of self-esteem - and the confidence that comes with it. You may not set out for better-fitting clothes, a slimmer physique, and the ability to climb a hill without getting winded. Oftentimes it happens before you even realize it. It's just one of the many benefits of physical activity that boost your body, mind, and spirit.

4. **Better sleep.** If you have trouble getting a good night's sleep, exercise can help with that, too. Physical activity increases body temperature, which can have calming effects on the mind, leading to less sheep counting and more shuteye. Exercise also helps regulate your circadian rhythm, our bodies' built-in alarm clock that controls when we feel tired and when we feel alert. (Although improved sleep is a psychological benefit of exercise, sleep experts recommend not exercising close to bedtime.)

5. **Brain boost.** From building intelligence to strengthening memory, exercise boosts brainpower in a number of ways. Studies on mice and humans indicate that cardiovascular exercise creates new brain cells-a process called neurogenesis - and improves overall brain performance. It also prevents cognitive decline and memory loss by strengthening the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning. Studies also prove that physical activity boosts creativity and mental energy. So if you're in need of inspiration, your big idea could be just a walk or jog away.



**YOU'RE ONLY ONE WORKOUT  
AWAY FROM A GOOD MOOD**

# CRANBERRIES: NOT JUST FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Source: Christine Pasley, University of Wyoming Extension

Having a tough time getting at least five servings of fruit and veggies every day? Look no further! An American berry is here to help! The cranberry, probably first used as a food by Native Americans, is just waiting for you and is brimming with powerful health benefits.

The cranberry is one of the North America's few native fruits, it provides versatility, convenience and nutritional benefits all rolled into one. Luckily, there are ways to obtain them year 'round, not just with your holiday turkey.

It's a mystery how cranberry sauce became a staple accompaniment to the Thanksgiving turkey. It was an ordinary, everyday accompaniment to meat in early colonial homes. By the late 18th century an average midday meal included cranberries in some form. Since the marshes of Cape Cod are a prime source of this native wetland berry, colonists had easy and abundant access to their harvest.

Cranberries are used in hearth baked breads as well as "put-up" as preserves.

With all the research supporting the positive health benefits of cranberries, it's time to start enjoying them all year long. The tart and tangy flavor of cranberries makes them a unique treat. They're fun to pair with favorite foods. In addition, as one of the best sources of valuable antioxidants, these tasty berries may aid in the prevention of heart disease and certain cancers.

These little red gems contain a wide variety of antioxidants. Many people including health professionals know that cranberries can help ward off bladder and urinary tract infections (UTIs). Studies show that cranberries actually contain 'bacteria-blockers', which prevent disease-causing bacteria from sticking to stomach cells, preventing the formation of certain ulcers. The same bacteria-blocking mechanism that helps prevent UTIs appears to keep certain bacteria from the surface of the tooth, reducing the formation of harmful plaque that leads to gum disease!

Cranberries are usually sold in 12-ounce bags. They should be brightly colored and fully red or yellowish-red with a smooth, firm, glossy skin. Soft or wrinkled berries should be discarded. Fresh berries can be stored in the original packages in the refrigerator crisper for up to four weeks. To preserve fresh cranberries to use year-round, you can freeze, can or dry them. To freeze cranberries, choose deep, fire-red berries with glossy skins. Wash and drain well and freeze them on a single-layer tray, before packing in containers.

Cranberries can be enjoyed as juice, salsa, chutneys, or preserves. Recently, cranberries have become a popular dried fruit, used in cookies and candies. They are added to cereals, and used in sauces, fruit salads, trail mix, and pies. Add zest to your tossed green salad with some dried cranberries. Energize your favorite fruit smoothie by blending in some cranberry juice. Surprise guests by topping seafood or poultry with a tangy cranberry relish, mixed in rice pilaf, or added to breads and desserts for a healthful, delicious surprise.

Don't let size fool you! Small, vibrant cranberries are a nutritional powerhouse. Add them to your A-List of foods that are delicious, nutritious and easy to prepare. ENJOY!!

# CRANBERRY ALMOND GREEN BEANS

Source: University of Wyoming Extension

## Ingredients

- 1 cup canned, frozen, or fresh green beans
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons dried cranberries or 1/2 cup fresh/frozen
- 2 tablespoons almonds (or other chopped nuts)
- 1/2 tablespoon honey
- Lemon pepper, dill, or seasoning blend of your choice

## Directions

1. Drain and rinse canned green beans. If using frozen or fresh, cook until crisp-tender and drain.
1. Heat oil in saucepan; add cranberries and nuts. Cook, stirring often.
1. Once cranberries are softened, stir in green beans. Sprinkle seasoning over beans and cook until beans are heated through.
1. Add honey and stir well. Serve beans hot. ENJOY



## FIT-EX AND BEYOND

Once FitEx is finished, many of us slip back into a busy and low activity lifestyle. Physical activity without the team goal and camaraderie may seem boring and you may not feel like exercising. Everyone, at one point or another, gets tired, bored, or whatever-we're not alone. Even internationally known athletes get tired of working out and, heck, their livelihood depends on it. Last week we wrote about the benefit of having those people who are important to us support us in the pursuit of a healthy, physically active lifestyle.

### STEP #7

It's no coincidence that one of the best ways to overcome the risk of relapsing into an inactive lifestyle is to build good support systems. Fitness friends are one of the oldest tricks in our motivational grab bag and we introduced you to it last week. Your fitness friends can help you get through the motivational badlands that will surely follow FitEx. Another good way to help you remain motivated is to celebrate the success you have felt during FitEx. People who exercise regularly or who have been overweight and have witnessed the dramatic results from exercise don't stray from it for very long.