

HEALTH BENEFITS OF SPORTS

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Annotation: Most of us take up sports as we are passionate about it. While some of us want to take it up as a career, many of us find it the best way to spend time and to have fun with our friends and family. It offers many benefits that are important to us in many ways other than just keeping ourselves fit.

Keywords: Sport, benefit, health, family, activity.

Being part of a [team for sports](#) like football, basketball, or soccer helps you to mingle with your teammates during practice matches and competitions as well. The closer the team members are with each other, the better the team dynamics will be which will then reflect on the team’s performance. Making these new connections with your teammates will help you to develop as a better human being. You will learn values like trusting your teammates, standing up for them in difficult situations, facing challenges, and working together as a team. Even with individual sports, you make new connections with your practice buddies, coaches, and even your opponents, thereby enhancing your social skills.

Even if you are playing for fun, sports help you to spend quality time with your friends and family. In the process, you will strengthen your relationship with them and learn to understand each other better. It will further improve your communication with others and create a positive learning environment. Developing good relationships with others is key to beating stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness as it helps develop a good support structure for you [2].

Health benefits are an inevitable outcome of playing sports. Let us take a closer look at some of the key benefits:

Strength, endurance, and flexibility: Physical activity during sports helps in increasing athletic strength and endurance by developing strong muscles and bones. It also improves flexibility, thereby reducing the risk of injuries.

Aerobic fitness for heart and lungs: Sports include aerobic activities like running and cycling that helps increase the breathing and heart rates. It helps keep the heart and lungs healthy and reduces the risk of heart diseases, stroke, and even diabetes.

Sleep: There is proof that exercising helps improve your sleep. Getting adequate sleep is vital for good health. Exercising can improve your sleep quality as well as sleep duration at night. It also helps in dealing with insomnia, obstructive sleep apnea, and other sleep disorders.

Weight management: Sports improves metabolism and helps burn calories. It is an effective way to [keep your weight in check](#) while having fun. Sports help in developing and building muscles in your body. Muscle tissues burn more calories even while at rest, thereby helping in reducing weight [5].

Control blood pressure and cholesterol: Physical activity helps keep your BP in check and reduces bad cholesterol or LDL. Aerobic exercises can help in lowering BP. Aerobic exercises also help in increasing the levels of HDL, also called good cholesterol, which helps in protecting the body from cholesterol buildup.

Improved immune system: Exercising and physical activity are essential to maintain a healthy immune system. Many scientific studies support this. Exercise increases blood and lymph flow to all parts of your body, thereby helping immune cells flow through the body at a higher rate.

Psychological benefits and mental health

While sports can be fun, their benefits on our psychology and mental health are paramount. Its effects on human psychology have been a widely researched topic. Sports have benefits for all age groups. Let us look at some of these benefits.

Beats stress, anxiety, and depression: Sports is one of the best ways to distract your mind from everyday stresses. Physical activity stimulates the production of endorphins, which are hormones that are known to relieve stress and pain. Playing can help your mood by diverting your mind away from any thoughts that are bothering you. Indulging regularly in sports can help you deal with anxiety and depression.

Improves focus and concentration: Many argue that students should avoid sports as it takes up a lot of time and interferes with academics. Contrary to this, sports can make a person sharper by improving their focus and concentration. It helps them to be better learners and great thinkers.

Self-discipline: Athletes are used to setting goals for themselves and then pushing themselves to become better to achieve those goals. It requires a great deal of self-discipline. It is an important characteristic that helps one become a better individual and achieve great things in life.

Sportsmanship: It is a trait of treating others with fairness and respect. It includes treating your opponents as well with the same level of ethics. Sports teach an athlete to hold ethics and moral values above one's own emotions, even in the face of a challenge or loss. Losing gracefully and winning with humility are traits that sports can teach you [6].

Self-confidence and Leadership: Playing sports can improve your physical and mental skills over time and boost your confidence and self-esteem tremendously. It will reflect in other aspects of life as well. It also gives you opportunities to face challenges and overcome them. These experiences, along with traits like self-discipline and self-confidence, will imbibe leadership qualities in a person.

Competitiveness: This is a trait that will help you a lot in your life. For an athlete competing is second nature. It will give them an edge in any situation in life as they will have a competitive mindset to face challenges without fear or hesitation.

Sports have many benefits for a person, irrespective of his/her age. Especially among children, it helps develop a habit and a lifestyle which will help them throughout their life. In adults, sports can prolong their physical well-being as well as enhance their mental health. So, start playing if you do not already so that you do not miss out on these benefits.

Sports are defined as all forms of competitive physical activity, through causal or organized participation in teams, which aims to maintain or improve human physical ability and skills, usually offering entertainment to participants and cheerfulness to winners. In some cases there are spectators or public who watch the sportive competition and do not participate themselves with any physical activity. On the other hand, physical activity does not necessarily imply the competitive component in teams, because it can be done individually and it is defined as any muscular effort or movements during personal systematic training, working out through different exercises. Those exercises are equally aimed to improve individual human physical ability and skills. Therefore, physical activity is usually a series of different modalities of physical exercises, involving different parts and muscles of the body and it is an essential previous step for any sport. Moreover, sport and physical exercises are sharing many common goals.

Recent studies show that physical exercises, regardless of type, from aerobic as even walking fast to anaerobic, at least three times per week, would decrease the risk of dementia over 65 years of age by up to 32 % [1-3], reaffirming the literal meaning of "healthy mind in a healthy body".

Physical activity acts on many metabolic aspects and we will expose in this review article three of these pillars of action with examples and scientific references:

- a) Physical well-being: Sport reduces stress [4] and facilitates endorphins release [5]. Also sport improves the immune system [6,7].
- b) Emotional well-being: Sport affects psychological elements such as self confidence [8,9] and it also reduces the risk of depression [1].
- c) Modification of the threshold for discomfort or pain: during exercise and after that, it helps to control pain perception [2,3].

In a pilot questionnaire performed among people who usually trains often (more than 3 times per week; N = 10) in a public sports center (gym), we collected these responses: 100% of respondents considered physical activities reduce stress; 85% of respondents felt that physical activities are improving mood; 100% of respondents considered physical activities enhance the immune system and 85% of respondents asserted physical activities are affecting subjective perception of pain.

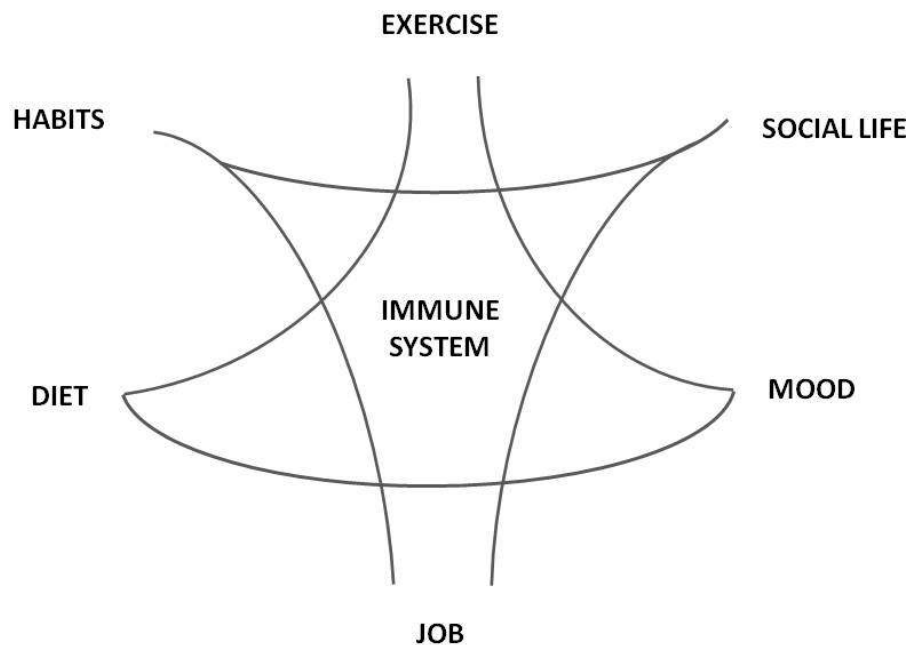
In this article we are explaining the benefits of physical exercise of a certain intensity as achievable during sport practicing. It is known the sentence “no pain no gain”, but it is not clear whether or how much pain is required to reach the psychological advantages of sport, for instance, as getting a better mood, being happier or less sad. Scientific data are mainly informing about the possible effects on health with aerobic exercises that are those making heart, lung, sweat gland and whole metabolism to work hard and awaking body to life, but anaerobic ones are also causing changes for good in metabolism and they are barely mentioned in research papers. Pain subjective perception is not the same in sportsmen and sportswomen, compared to sedentary persons [4].

Some scientific studies have shown that stress generated in our muscles during sports practicing are helping to release our own tensions [5,6] and to reduce our stress level [4]. The endorphins hypothesis is the most popular explanation about how a physical mechanism is underlying the profits of sports. In the brain, the hypothalamus produces endorphins in the form of peptides and pituitary releases them into blood circulation. Later on, these endorphins are acting on their own receptors. It has been demonstrated In vivo that professional runners are releasing endogenous opioids, in the frontolimbic brain regions, after a sustained and intense physical exercise practice. That release is, in fact, closely correlated with perceived subjective euphoria.

Therefore, endorphins are neuropeptides which are produced by the body itself and are related to the immune system. It has been shown that immune cells are capable of producing neuropeptides itself, like endogenous opioids and endorphins [6,7]. This fact is pointing out the bidirectional link and the communicative route between the nervous and the immune systems, that might be improved with sport exercises. Endogenous opioid peptides are released in response to physical exercise, as well as the immunomodulation mechanism is activated [6]. Even the mere gesture of smiling makes us to increase secretion of endorphins [8], however, it is well known that the immune system is affected by many other variables apart from sports. That might be

the reason why a casual relationship is so difficult to establish, as it is visually explained in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Schematic visual representation of the possible elements that are affecting our immune system. Multidimensional relationship happening between different variables is visually explained



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