The Benefits of Morning Workouts

Exercise is a good idea no matter what time of day you do it. However, in recent years, a flurry of research has highlighted an interesting bit of science: Morning workouts seem to have a edge over working out at other times of the day, and for a few different reasons, including avoiding the heat of the day.

To better understand why it might be worth considering getting up a little earlier to exercise, we spoke with Stephen Noel Henry, DO, a physician at the University of Miami Sports Medicine Institute. Here’s what he had to say about the benefits of morning workouts.

1. Start your day off right

Science aside, Dr. Henry says there is just something to be said for starting your day off with a healthy activity such as exercise. “Doing your workout early in the morning helps you avoid distractions that prevent exercise later in the day and just check it off your list,” he says. “And it provides benefits for your body for the rest of the day.”
2. Weight loss

One of those benefits for regular morning exercisers may include weight loss. According to a 2019 article in the *International Journal of Obesity*, a group who exercised exclusively in the morning was more likely to lose weight over 10 months than those who exercised later in the afternoon. Other studies, says Dr. Henry, have shown that morning exercisers are more likely to make healthier food choices throughout the day, which may play into this phenomenon.

3. Early exercise boosts your mood and reduces stress

According to the American Psychological Association, the impact of exercise on mood is well-documented. Usually, you’ll start to experience improvements within a few minutes of beginning a workout. Starting your day this way can have a positive impact throughout the day.

Part of the reason morning exercise may help your mood throughout the day, says Dr. Henry, is its role in regulating stress. “Cortisol, the stress hormone, usually has high levels in the morning when you wake up. If there’s a lot, it can be detrimental,” he says. “Exercise helps regulate those cortisol levels, and that continues for the rest of the day.”

4. It's better than a strong cup of coffee

For older adults, morning exercise may have mental benefits, as well. In a 2018 study in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, a group of older adults had better memory and cognitive function when they broke up their mornings with moderate-intensity walking sessions than when they sat in place all morning. Researchers found a substance within the brain that improves memory and cognitive function - serum brain-derived neurotrophic growth factor - increased after the walking sessions.

5. You'll sleep more soundly

Just like exercise, sleep is critical to our overall health. With morning workouts, these two benefits can go hand in hand. “If you start your day with a good expenditure of energy, it seems to increase melatonin levels later in the day,” says Dr. Henry. “This sets your internal clock in a way that promotes healthy sleep patterns and gets you into a good routine each night.”

Get started with morning workouts

Now, this might all sound great when it comes to morning workouts, but if you’re not a morning person, it might also seem impossible.

“The easiest step is to start going to bed a little earlier than you usually do,” he says. “This will make it easier to wake up early to get started on this routine. I also recommend exercising once a week to start and gradually working your way up to more morning workouts. You can also begin with something simple, like a morning walk, to get yourself going.”

Wyatt Myers is a contributing writer for UMiami Health News.

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