

The Importance of **MENTAL FITNESS**

by *Connie Stapleton, PhD*



FITNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH: HOW DO THEY GO TOGETHER?

Fitness, according to the American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary of Psychology, is having the skills it takes — the strength, agility and flexibility — to do what needs to be done in a person's daily life without overly exerting themselves and still having enough energy to engage in activities they enjoy. Maintaining physical fitness includes the behaviors necessary to lose weight and maintain weight-loss: making healthy food choices, eating reasonable portion sizes, getting enough sleep, drinking plenty of water and consistently engaging in physical exercise.

Mental health, as defined by the APA, is “a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life.”

Mental fitness, then, is having the skills to live as a well-adjusted adult. Attributes of maintaining mental fitness include:

- Knowing how to respond to people in situations in an appropriate way
- Communicating directly
- Setting boundaries with self and others
- Using healthy coping skills
- Engaging in healthy acts of self-care

BECOMING PHYSICALLY FIT AND MENTALLY FIT TAKES WORK!

You need to learn and practice good habits to increase both your physical and mental fitness. People working to lose weight and improve their overall physical fitness do so by:

- Engaging in exercise
- Drinking water
- Preparing and eating healthy foods in healthy portion sizes
- Getting enough sleep
- Eating on a regular schedule

The same physical activities necessary to lose weight are required to maintain weight-loss. To live at a weight that is healthy for your body means learning, practicing and sustaining these physical behaviors. People who do this end up with good overall physical fitness.

Good mental fitness is equally important in the process of losing weight and remaining at a healthy weight. Improving mental fitness also means learning, practicing and maintaining healthy emotional habits. Healthy emotional behaviors include:

- Getting professional help to address depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorders and other clinically diagnosed conditions
- Learning healthy coping skills to prevent emotional eating
- Developing a positive mindset
- Getting rid of self-sabotaging thoughts and behaviors

Losing weight and maintaining a healthy weight require implementing and practicing both physical and mental fitness skills. Mental fitness skills help tremendously to encourage ongoing physical fitness. Having healthy goals and a positive outlook will strengthen your commitment to engaging in regular physical activity. Learning to set boundaries and establish healthy self-care practices will also reinforce physical fitness behaviors.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MIND AND BODY

Research supports a strong connection between emotions and their impact on the body. Consistently feeling stressed, anxious or depressed can have a negative impact on your immune system and other bodily functions. Positive emotions, on the other hand, are linked to pain reduction, improved immunity and a longer life. Learning how to improve your mental fitness can help you follow through with the physical behaviors and habits that result in weight-loss and weight maintenance. The mind-body connection is key to being able to live a healthier life.

About the Author:

Connie Stapleton, PhD, is a licensed psychologist who has worked in the field of bariatric medicine for the past 15 years. She has published several books on the topic of bariatric surgery and is a national and international speaker for both patient and professional audiences. Dr. Stapleton's primary focus is helping patients address emotional and psychological issues related to maintaining a healthy weight following bariatric surgery.



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ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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