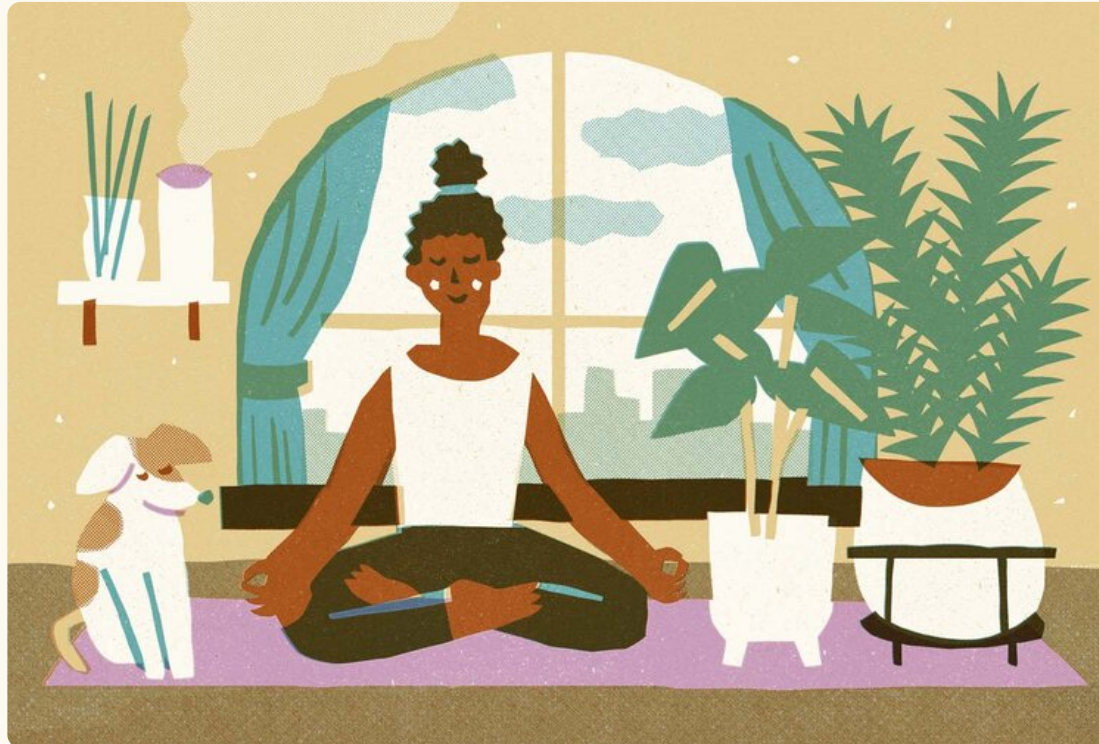


Home › The Self-Care & Well- 9 Activities Proven to Release Endorphins and
Library › Being › Boost Your Mood

9 Activities Proven to Release Endorphins and Boost Your Mood

Jun 23 | Written By Lindsey Olander



Illustrations by [Asahi Nagata](#)

One of the many, many incredible things about the human body is that we have a built-in medicine for feeling good. That medicine is known as endorphins – chemicals cooked up right inside our own brains that play a vital role in not only boosting positive emotions, but vanquishing the bad ones, too. The best part? We have the power to activate them on our own from the comfort of our homes.

Would you believe that eating a chocolate bar and smelling a bouquet of lavender have been shown to improve both physical health and our mental well-being? Here's how doing both (plus 7 other easy activities) can put you back on track.

1. Stop and smell the roses

Aromatherapy, the therapeutic use of smells emitted by essential plant oils, is utilized by wellness and medical professionals around the world to promote a sense of calm. Not all scents have health-boosting benefits, but some – rose, vanilla, lavender, and jasmine, to name a few – help nerve cells release endorphins, which go a long way toward reducing anxiety, improving sleep, and increasing quality of life.

Vanilla is a warming scent that has been used as a home remedy for headaches and nausea as far back as the 17th century. Today, it's used to alleviate stress. A study at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center showed that breathing in vanilla-scented air reduced anxiety in patients by as much as 63% versus those who inhaled unscented air. Lavender oil is often used during meditation and has a particularly cooling and harmonizing effect that lifts the spirits and reduces insomnia, while jasmine is a popular choice for massages because it helps relieve muscle

tension and restores energy. Rose oil has also been proven to have a relaxing effect, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Lighting candles and buying flowers is easy enough, but you can even go a step further. Add a few drops of vanilla to your morning coffee pot or bath water, invest in an essential oil diffuser, or dab some diluted lavender or jasmine oil onto your wrists and temples and carry the scent with you all day long.

2. Add chocolate to your shopping list

No wonder so many people crave chocolate! Cacao contains stimulating ingredients including phenethylamine (which boosts endorphins) and theobromine (which suppresses pain) that, when eaten, have been shown to activate more of the brain than a passionate kiss.

Dark chocolate, in particular, helps protect against strokes and heart attacks thanks to an abundance of flavanols – powerful antioxidants that reduce inflammation and blood pressure. In fact, some studies have shown that eating chocolate in moderation can lower cardiovascular disease by as much as 39 percent.

3. Work those heart muscles

“Runner’s High,” the so-called state of euphoria runners can feel after a lengthy workout, is not a myth. Not only is exercise (in all forms) great for the health of your heart and your body, it’s also great for your mind.

Studies have shown that aerobic exercises in particular – ones that focus on cardio, like running, biking, dancing, swimming, and even gardening – can be as effective as antidepressants. Not only do these activities release mood-boosting endorphins and burn calories, over time, they can also change the brain structure that controls mood and cognition, in turn improving memory retention, energy levels, and a person’s overall outlook on themselves.

4. Practice your downward dog

Vinyasa aside, most types of yoga do not fall under aerobic exercise, but the practice’s health and wellness benefits go just as far toward improving your state of mind.

As a discipline, yoga focuses on breathing, meditation, stretching, and holding postures for short periods of time – all of which forcibly teach you to slow down, easing anxiety and promoting mental relaxation in the process. By holding certain poses, you also build muscle strength, which, apart from promoting weight loss, increases mindful control over the body, helping you feel more in control of your own life.

In fact, according to a study by the *Journal of Alternate and Complementary Medicine*, regularly practicing light yoga releases a calming chemical called GABA that, over time, helps rewire the brain to have a calmer, less anxious response to daily stressors.

5. Pucker up

One of life's greatest, incomparable pleasures is the simple act of touch. Be it a hug, holding hands, canoodling on the couch, or full-on sex, touching – and being touched by – another person does wonders for your health by actively decreasing blood pressure and stress hormones while increasing overall happiness and fulfillment.

In a committed relationship? This may be an opportune moment to prioritize intimacy. Kissing stimulates a ton of pleasure-positive brain chemicals, including dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin – the love hormone. Together, these boost your self-esteem, soothe your soul, and help you destress. Of course, as humans, we're also programmed to enjoy a little action between the sheets. Not only is sex a fun, natural mood-booster, it can also help battle insomnia. When you orgasm, your body releases a hormone called prolactin, a relaxer linked to improved sleep.

Keep in Touch

Join our email list to receive getaway & staycation inspiration, tips for finding balance in your daily life, and more.

6. Plan a date with Mother Nature

There is growing research that being near the trees does wonders for your mental health. Exposure to calming nature sounds – yes, even silence – has been shown to lower blood pressure and levels of cortisol, a stress hormone linked to negative thoughts and emotions. One recent study showed that as little as 20 minutes spent inside a park can improve your outlook on life.

Is nature not easily accessible from your urban apartment? Why not look into becoming a plant parent?

7. Laugh until it hurts

American journalist Norman Cousins once likened laughing to “inner jogging,” and scientists agree. Both work the muscles – laughing exercises the diaphragm, shoulders, abdomen, and heart – and produce similar health benefits including lowering blood pressure, aiding muscle relaxation, and reducing stress hormones like cortisol and dopamine.

Even the act of laughter, the most physical release of joy, has a domino effect on well-being. When you giggle, your body releases endorphins, the most natural painkiller, while increasing your body’s number of antibody-producing cells, boosting the immune system. Not to mention laughing brings your focus away from negative emotions in a healthy, natural way.

Finding humor in the everyday can mean all the difference, but you can also take a more active approach to bringing laughter into your life, like turning on a comedy special or movie or hosting a virtual game night with friends or family.

8. Break out the bubbly

The term “happy hour” is not a coincidence. Alcohol is a scientifically proven happiness booster.

While we certainly don’t condone making it a habit, a drink can have a lightning-quick mood-boosting effect, releasing endorphins (specifically dopamine) connected to short-term pleasure, euphoria, and reward – the same kinds of brain chemicals you get from antidepressants.

Don’t reach too quickly for the hard stuff, though. As it turns out, red wine and beer are most likely to relax you, according to a [global survey](#), while spirits are more linked to emotional mood swings.

9. Mix things up

While all of the above are easy-to-tackle ways to keep your spirits high, it’s important not to depend on or invest in any one single activity. Too much of any good thing, after all, could be detrimental – not to mention repetition is one of the leading causes of [boredom](#).

Fall into a good [workout routine](#)? Remember to switch things up so your muscles can take a break. Ramping up bedroom time with your partner? Throw in some spontaneity every once in a while to prevent intimacy from

getting stale. Discover your sweet tooth? Be sure to treat desserts as an indulgence, not as a daily meal.

On the flip side, if on some days you find yourself so overwhelmed that you end up overdoing it on the sweets and binge-watching Netflix through your afternoon workout routine, *forgive yourself*. Times are crazy right now. You're doing great.

We endorse products, services, and places that we genuinely love. If you make a purchase through our links, we may earn an affiliate commission.

See Related Articles



I Hated Learning About History Until I Went on an Adult Field Trip

There's Creativity in All of Us — Here's How to Find Yours

10 Charming New England Bookstores Worth Planning a Trip Around

See All Articles

Lindsey Olander

Lindsey Olander is a writer, editor, and insatiable traveler based in New York whose words have been published by *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Departures*, Tripadvisor, and others. Read more of her work at lindseytravels.com or say hi on Instagram [@lindseytravels](https://www.instagram.com/lindseytravels).

◀ **The Movement to Make Instagram Casual Again**

Hunting for Swimming Hole Hideaways in New England ▶