

Making the Case: Recreation for Mental Health



All types of recreation, including social recreation, creative pursuits, and physical activity, are good for our mental health.

Key benefits of recreation include reduced stress and increased ability to cope.



The Canadian National Recreation Agenda states that recreation is the “experience that results from freely chosen participation in physical, social, intellectual, creative and spiritual pursuits that enhance individual and community wellbeing” (1). Recent research tells us that all types of recreation, including social recreation like playing cards and

bowling, creative pursuits like music and art, and physical activity, are good for our mental health.

Social benefits of recreation activities include the creation of social connections through expanded social networks (e.g., you can make new friends); opportunities for social connection (e.g., you can feel a sense of connection and belonging); change in social skills (e.g., you can focus less on yourself and more on others). In short, recreation is an opportunity for social inclusion, where the activity can increase your access to community and community resources. For example, research shows that participation in a football club can cultivate socializing outside the club (2), and community art venues can be a bridge into the local community (3). Additionally, the possibility of developing an identity that is associated with a recreation activity, such as an artist or a soccer player, positively impacts our well-being (4).

Mental health improvements from recreation activities include increased self-esteem and Flow (i.e., absorption in the present moment) (5). Additional benefits include a sense of accomplishment (6), increased self-confidence (7), reduced stress and increased ability to cope (8), improved quality of life (9), and life satisfaction (10). Life skills benefits of community recreation participation include skill development that can be used in other areas of life (11).

In short, research shows that recreation of all kinds, including social activities, creative activities, and physical activities, is good for our mental health.

References

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