

3 REASONS We Should Consider Shifting Our Workouts With the Seasons



During life's most demanding stages, like parenthood and midlife, it can be challenging to stay active, to say the least. Often, there are daily interruptions that quite frankly feel like they strive against our every plan for exercising.

Having a flexible mindset can ensure that we are equipped with a plentiful mix of options when life throws us a curveball. Even if it's not the workout we set out to accomplish at the start of the day, simply choosing to move in a way that leaves us feeling renewed supports our greater goal of caring for ourselves.

Rather than trying to aim for the bullseye each time and feeling upset when we miss, we can approach exercise with a different focus — strive to more consistently support our wellbeing. Consistency over quantity is key. Michelle Segar, a University of Michigan researcher, long-time health coach and the pioneer of this approach says "making daily decisions that can bend, press and stretch within our changing context allows us to hit the mark every time!"

Using the revolving seasons as an opportunity to make workout

changes can be a helpful strategy for sustaining this supreme flexibility.

Melissa Urban, co-founder and CEO of Whole30 recommends using the warmer seasons for light, long and flowing fitness like walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, hiking, yoga or anything outdoors. Winter is reserved for heavy, fast and more structured movement like lifting weights, strength training at the gym, high-intensity interval training cardio or hot yoga, for example.

CHANGING UP OUR FITNESS ROUTINE WITH THE FOUR SEASONS CAN:

Prevent injuries: Mixing our movement up each season helps our bodies recover while calling on different muscle groups.

Boost motivation and support mental wellbeing: Exploring new environments, movement patterns, activities, social groups, speeds, intensities, and/or equipment can provide a refreshing dose of organic motivation for any human. It can also

enhance the immediate benefits linked with physical activity, like more energy and reduced feelings of stress.

We can choose movement outdoors through all the seasons to support overall mental wellbeing. Nature can relieve stress, improve cognitive functioning and memory, sharpen focus, reduce negative rumination and enhance creativity.

Balance overall fitness: Mixing it up as the seasons oscillate can help us build strength or endurance in different parts of our bodies with different forms of movement.

Tailoring our movement patterns to the new season can keep us flexible, but we also don't have to wait until the season shifts to make a fitness change. We can treat our daily exercise like the span of options presented to us at any ice cream shop — choosing the flavor of fitness that matches our current needs, feelings or energy levels.

"Three Reasons to Shift Your Workouts With the Seasons," Melissa Urban, blog.melissau.com, Nov. 11, 2024.

"Sustainable Change in the Real World Newsletter," Michelle Segar, michellesegar.com, accessed Dec. 3, 2024.

"MARRY ME" CHICKPEAS

Prep: 5 minutes • Cook: 10 minutes • Total: 15 minutes • Serves: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 5 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon red chili flakes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- (2) 15-ounce cans chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 cup cream (or 1 to 1 ½ cups of plain Greek yogurt for a healthy substitute)
- 2 cups baby spinach, sliced
- 4-5 fresh basil leaves, chopped
- Optional: ½ cup grated parmesan cheese



DIRECTIONS

- Warm the olive oil in a large sauté pan over low-medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring frequently, until fragrant.
- Stir in the sun-dried tomatoes, oregano, red chili flakes, salt and black pepper. Cook for 1 minute.
- Add the chickpeas, broth, tomato paste, cream and spinach and stir well. Bring to a gentle simmer over medium heat and cook for about 5 minutes, until warm and the spinach has wilted. Taste; add more salt, pepper, or red pepper flakes as desired.
- Remove from heat and stir in the fresh basil and grated parmesan. Serve immediately with crusty bread for dipping, or on top of cooked rice, pasta, or mashed potato.

Calories: 294kcal, Carbohydrates: 33g, Protein: 10g, Fat: 15g, Saturated Fat: 8g, Polyunsaturated Fat: 1g, Monounsaturated Fat: 3g, Sodium: 690mg, Potassium: 736mg, Fiber: 8g, Sugar: 8g, Vitamin A: 1231IU, Vitamin C: 9mg, Calcium: 83mg, Iron: 5mg

Adapted from NoraCooks.com.



Getting Creative With Mental Health

With brisk, cold weather outside and the sun beginning to set just as soon as the workday has concluded, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), commonly known as seasonal depression, is a concern for many. SAD makes it hard for many of us to keep up with the demands of everyday life in the new year, especially once the excitement of the holiday season has died down.

One of the more surprising, yet beneficial, tools at our disposal in our ongoing mental health journey is the power of art and creativity.

The Connection Between Creativity and Mental Health

Engaging in any kind of art, whether it be drawing, painting, writing poetry, etc., requires a high level of focus and concentration. This is essentially no different from meditating, which many different researchers have proven can be beneficial when it comes to easing psychological stresses like anxiety and depression.

As you engage in creative practices, allow yourself to acknowledge your anxieties and recognize them simply as thoughts, as opposed to something that defines you or something that can actively harm you. Over time, encouraging your own creativity can actually alter your brain in a positive way. Harvard researchers found that meditation can literally change the brain's grey matter, thus leading to improved mood, memory and an overall reduction in stress.

So, it turns out, there's a lot of power in sitting, momentarily slowing down our thoughts, and letting our hands do the work. However, if arts and crafts aren't necessarily your strong suit, there are still plenty of great ways you can get the creative juices flowing.

Strategies To Get You Started

Coloring

There's been plenty of talk recently about the anxiety-relieving benefits of coloring for adults, which also means there are a lot of options out there for cool and interesting coloring books that might catch your eye — there are even options

designed specifically for stress-relief! A quick Internet search can help you find something that fits your unique taste!

Collage/Scrapbooking

Structured, simple and as inexpensive as you choose to make it, creating collages or engaging in scrapbooking are great ways to organize your creative thoughts, fuel your sense of accomplishment and even make use of everyday items. Try some tips for scrapbooking on a budget, like shopping with a list and sticking to it or using household items like old fabric, clothing tags, buttons, office supplies, or ticket stubs.

Doodling

While you might have gotten scolded for doing it along the margins of your assignments back in school, there's actually evidence that seemingly aimless doodling might have "unexpected therapeutic benefits." You could try out "zentangle," which involves abstract repetitive patterns, or you could opt for something a bit more structured with the geometric-designed mandala method.

Creative Writing

If more straightforward arts and crafts don't appeal to you, why not try your hand at creative writing? There are plenty of mental health related journaling prompts specifically dedicated to helping you with your more complicated thought patterns, or you could check out some more general creative writing prompts for inspiration toward a poem or short story.

Remember, your art can be for you alone, so perfection isn't the goal here. It's really about spending time with your thoughts in a space that is safe and non-judgmental, while also encouraging your more creative instincts to take charge. So, don't be afraid to experiment and, most of all, have fun!

"Meditation and Its Mental and Physical Health Benefits in 2023," Aneque Jamil et al, PubMed Central, June 19, 2023. "Eight weeks to a better brain," Sue McCrevey, news.harvard.edu, Jan. 21, 2011. "Health Benefits of Coloring for Adults," Beaumont.org, Accessed Dec. 5, 2024. "53 Tips for Beginner Scrapbookers," blog.thepapermillstore.com, March 24, 2016. "Doodling and the default network of the brain," GD Schott, The Lancet, Sept. 24, 2011. "How to Make a Zentangle," Kelly Medford, wikihow.com, Sept. 28, 2024. "How to Draw a Mandala," Thaneeya McArdle, art-is-fun.com, Accessed Dec. 5, 2024. "20 Journaling Prompts for Mental Health," Charlie Health Editorial Team, charliehealth.com, July 13, 2023. "365 Creative Writing Prompts," Chelle Stein, thinkwritten.com, Feb. 17, 2023.