# Five-minute daily workouts offer surprising gains in strength and mental health



# Unlocking the Benefits of Five-Minute Daily Workouts

In a society where gym memberships and hour-long training sessions reign supreme, a recent study from Edith Cowan University challenges this conventional wisdom. This research highlights that even a simple, five-minute bodyweight workout can lead to significant improvements in both physical and mental health for sedentary individuals. This newfound perspective emphasises that substantial fitness gains can be made without formal training environments or complex regimens.

The study, published in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology*, involved a four-week period where participants engaged in a series of basic bodyweight exercises: chair squats, wall press-ups, chair reclines, and heel drops. These activities were performed with an emphasis on eccentric movements, meaning participants were instructed to slowly lower their bodies during repetitions, thus enhancing muscle engagement. The results were compelling: participants saw gains not just in muscle strength and endurance but also in mood and overall mental well-being.

The routine was straightforward: ten repetitions of each exercise, executed with a deliberate tempo. Participants could schedule these workouts flexibly throughout their day, illustrating how brevity and accessibility can encourage habitual exercise. The inclusion of progressive overload—advancing to more challenging variations of each exercise—ensured continuous development. This approach uncovers a fundamental truth about fitness: a little effort, when done repeatedly, can yield considerable results.

Despite the promising outcomes, sceptics may argue that the study's small sample size limits broader applicability. Yet, Dr Richard Blagrove, a senior lecturer in physiology at Loughborough University, asserts that even minimal exercise can yield substantial health benefits. He cites research in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, indicating that participants burning just an additional 500 calories weekly—equivalent to a modest daily effort—showed reduced mortality risks compared to those who remained inactive. This notion is echoed by various studies highlighting that even short bursts of activity trigger beneficial physiological changes, such as improved blood flow and better blood-sugar regulation, consequently lowering the risk of chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

Observable improvements in mood also merit discussion. Exercise is widely recognised for its mental health benefits, with research demonstrating that less than an hour of exercise per week can have protective effects against depression. Samuel B. Harvey, an associate professor at the University of New South Wales, reports that a significant portion of the protective impact of physical activity against depression is achieved within the first hour of engagement weekly, regardless of intensity.

Joe Wicks, a prominent figure in fitness education, reinforces these findings through firsthand observations from his workplace wellness initiative. He notes stark contrasts in energy levels and mental health between employees who incorporate even minimal exercise into their schedules and those who do not. Wicks advises individuals struggling to find time for a full workout to seize opportunities, however brief, to move. “I want to make it really manageable,” he explains, encouraging people to utilise short periods during their day for physical activity to foster long-term health benefits.

The idea of "exercise snacking," or breaking up periods of sedentary behaviour with short bursts of exercise, is gaining traction. Research shows that just 16 minutes of bodyweight exercises, dispersed throughout a workday, can mitigate the adverse effects of prolonged sitting. Such findings reinforce the tenet that every muscle contraction counts, and that forming exercise habits through consistent, manageable efforts can pave the way for considerable long-term gains.

Importantly, understanding the SAID principle—specific adaptations to imposed demands—provides clarity on how the body responds to regular activity. Whether the routine involves lifting weights or simply standing up from a chair, consistent movement fosters adaptation, improving muscular function and reflexes over time.

In summary, the evidence emerging from recent studies indicates that substantial health benefits can be unlocked through small, daily commitments to exercise. For those who fancy themselves too busy or unfit to embark on rigorous workout regimes, the tenets of progressive strength training and short, effective routines provide a viable path to improved health. The imperative here is clear: when it comes to fitness, even a little can go a long way.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/health-and-fitness/study-daily-workout-improve-fitness-b2746536.html), [[2]](https://www.womanandhome.com/health-wellbeing/health-wellbeing-news/5-minute-workout-news/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/health-and-fitness/study-daily-workout-improve-fitness-b2746536.html), [[2]](https://www.womanandhome.com/health-wellbeing/health-wellbeing-news/5-minute-workout-news/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://time.com/6242876/short-workouts-health-benefits/), [[5]](https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1818161115)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2017.11a11), [[7]](https://www.discovery.com/science/How-Little-Exercise-It-Takes-Boost-Your-Mental-Health)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2017.11a11), [[3]](https://time.com/6242876/short-workouts-health-benefits/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/health-and-fitness/study-daily-workout-improve-fitness-b2746536.html), [[2]](https://www.womanandhome.com/health-wellbeing/health-wellbeing-news/5-minute-workout-news/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://time.com/6242876/short-workouts-health-benefits/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[7]](https://www.discovery.com/science/How-Little-Exercise-It-Takes-Boost-Your-Mental-Health)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/health-and-fitness/study-daily-workout-improve-fitness-b2746536.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.womanandhome.com/health-wellbeing/health-wellbeing-news/5-minute-workout-news/> - A recent study from Edith Cowan University in Australia found that a daily 5-minute bodyweight workout can significantly improve physical and mental health, even for sedentary but healthy individuals. Over a four-week period, participants performed bodyweight strength training exercises such as squats and press-ups, emphasizing eccentric movement—slowing down during muscle lengthening phases. Despite the short duration, results showed marked improvements in muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, and quicker post-exercise heart rate recovery, indicating better cardiovascular health. Participants also experienced enhanced mood and mental well-being. The study advocates for eccentric exercises due to their effectiveness and accessibility, requiring no gym equipment. While 5 minutes daily (35 minutes weekly) falls short of the 150-minute weekly exercise guideline recommended by institutions like the NHS, researchers argue that even minimal consistent efforts can motivate beginners and serve as a foundation for more extensive routines. This approach highlights that every muscle contraction counts, and forming a habit through short workouts can lead to long-term health benefits.
3. <https://time.com/6242876/short-workouts-health-benefits/> - Federal guidelines recommend U.S. adults get at least 75 minutes of vigorous or 150 minutes of less-intense physical activity weekly, but recent studies show that even much shorter workouts can be beneficial. Research indicates that even tiny amounts of exercise, like three one-minute bursts of vigorous activity or 10-15 minutes per week, could extend life expectancy. Short bursts of activity trigger physiological changes like increased blood flow and better blood-sugar regulation, potentially reducing risks for conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Additionally, breaking up sedentary time with short movement segments provides significant health benefits. However, while short exercises improve health, they might not yield dramatic results for weight loss or athletic training. Intensity and duration are essential, as vigorous activities are more efficient. Overall, even brief workouts can enhance physical and mental well-being, contributing to longevity and improved health.
4. <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2012/november/study-pinpoints-just-how-much-exercise-is-good-for-mental-he/> - Researchers led by Carol Ewing Garber and John Allegrante find that more than 7.5 hours of exercise per week is associated with an increase in depression and anxiety. Scientists and devotees of regular exercise have long known that fitness keeps minds healthy as well as bodies. In addition to regulating weight and building physical strength, exercise improves self-esteem, mitigates anxiety, calms the nerves and elevates the mood and vitality. But what is the optimum amount of physical activity associated with better mental health? Now, a research team led by professors at Teachers College, Columbia University has come up with an answer: 2.5 to 7.5 hours of exercise per week, depending on gender, age and general physical health. A novel finding of the study conducted by exercise, behavioral, and health education scientists revealed that exercising more than 7.5 hours per week was associated with diminished mental health.
5. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.1818161115> - Suwabe et al. (1) composed a well-written and interesting study examining the relationship between mild exercise and hippocampal memory function. It is interesting that the neurobiological mechanisms responsible for the effects of exercise are systematically investigated. A prominent finding was that a short bout (10 min) of mild exercise increased activity, specifically in hippocampal subregions and in the entorhinal and parahippocampal cortices. This can be understood as a neurobiological mechanism that has contributed to exercise-induced cognitive benefits. We concur with Suwabe et al. (1), although we can identify one main problem in this study pointing to the intensity of exercise, which moderates the magnitude of the exercise-induced effect on cognition. A single bout of exercise at very light intensity (the authors specified this as 30% peak oxygen uptake) was chosen to prescribe a stress-free intervention, which was not supposed to trigger increases in cortisol. However, it appears that the term “very light intensity” was not specified accurately.
6. <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2017.11a11> - Research over the years has shown that regular physical activity can help relieve depression, but this study may be the first to recommend a specific “dose” of exercise. Even one hour per week of relatively low-level exercise can provide significant protection against future depression, according to a large population study published October 3 in AJP in Advance. “The majority of the protective effect of exercise against depression is realized within the first hour of exercise each week and was observed regardless of intensity,” wrote Samuel B. Harvey, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, and colleagues. While acknowledging that higher levels of exercise are required to achieve cardiovascular benefits, the authors assert that “informing individuals that significant mental health benefits may be achieved with small changes in their behavior may be valuable in facilitating behavioral change.” Because low levels of exercise were found protective, they suggest everyday activities, such as walking or cycling, may protect against depression.
7. <https://www.discovery.com/science/How-Little-Exercise-It-Takes-Boost-Your-Mental-Health> - When it came to how much exercise a person needed to see the biggest mental health benefits, it turned out that more wasn't better. Here's a graph of the relationship between amount of exercise and the number of bad mental health days someone had. The dashed lines indicate 3, 4, and 5 days a week, respectively. You can see that as exercise frequency increases, mental health burden decreases — up until a point, when mental health gets worse again. Something similar happens with exercise duration. According to the researchers, the sweet spot is right around 30–60 minutes three to five times a week (or 120–360 minutes per week, total). Any more or less, and the brain benefits wane. But if you work out more than that, there's reason for hope. As Alex Hutchinson points out over at Outside Online, the data doesn't actually say that exercising more than five times a week is detrimental; only that three to five times a week is better overall than six to seven times. That might sound like a minor difference, but it's a significant one.