

Wellness Wednesday



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Revealing 5 Creative Activities That Can Make You Happier

Creativity has long been recognized as a powerful tool for self-expression and personal growth. Engaging in creative activities not only allows us to tap into our imagination and express our emotions but also has a profound impact on our mental health and overall well-being. In fact, recent studies have revealed that certain creative activities can significantly boost happiness, reduce stress, and improve our overall quality of life.

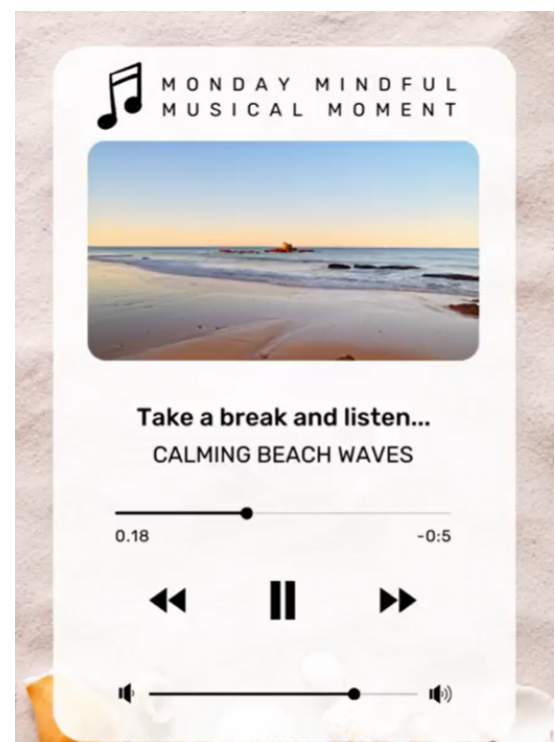
In this Wellness Wednesday, we will explore the five most effective creative activities that have been shown to promote mental health and happiness. These activities include listening to music, solving puzzles, singing or dancing, drawing, painting, or sculpting, and creative writing. Let's delve into each of these activities and discover how they can positively impact our well-being.

Listening to Music: A Melodic Path to Happiness

Music has a unique ability to evoke emotions and transport us to different emotional states. Whether it's a catchy pop tune, a soulful ballad, or a lively classical piece, listening to music can have a profound impact on our mood and emotional well-being. Numerous studies have shown that music can regulate our emotions, reduce stress and anxiety, and even alleviate physical pain.

According to a study conducted by the Graduate University of Mongolia, different genres of music can have specific effects on our mental health. Pop, metal, rock, Western classical, and Chinese traditional music have been found to have a positive correlation with mental health and daily behavior. On the other hand, genres like hip-hop and rap can promote cultural identity and inspire social connection.

Listening to music not only has mental health benefits but also contributes to physical well-being. It has been found to improve posture and movement, reduce agitation associated with illness, and even lower blood pressure. Even having background music can reduce anxiety levels and increase relaxation.



(Checkout our Monday Mindful Musical Moment on LinkedIn!)

Solving Puzzles: Exercising the Mind

Engaging in puzzles, such as crosswords, sudoku, or jigsaw puzzles, is not only a fun and entertaining activity but also an excellent way to boost our cognitive functions and reduce stress. Solving puzzles challenges our brain, enhances our problem-solving skills, and improves our concentration and decision-making abilities.

Research has shown that puzzle games can enhance the function of the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for cognitive functions. In addition to improving brain function, crossword puzzles can expand our vocabulary, stimulate thinking, boost confidence, and enhance learning capacity.

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* focused on adults with mild cognitive impairment and found that engaging in moderately difficult crossword puzzles resulted in a measurable decrease in brain shrinkage. This suggests that solving puzzles can potentially reduce the risk of further cognitive decline.

Engaging in puzzles not only exercises our mind but also gives us a sense of accomplishment, leading to increased positive emotions and reduced anxiety, depression, and stress.

Singing or Dancing: Expressing Emotions Through Movement

Singing and dancing are powerful creative activities that allow us to express ourselves and process a range of emotions. These activities provide a safe outlet for emotional expression and release, enabling us to experience a shift in attention and focus while changing our physiological state.

Group singing, in particular, has been found to have numerous cognitive health and well-being benefits, especially for older adults and individuals with mental health problems, lung disease, stroke, and dementia. Synchronized movement during live music activates memory and perception, creating a unique and uplifting experience.

Engaging in physical activities like singing and dancing releases natural endorphins, which elevate mood and contribute to a sense of well-being. These activities serve as healthy distractions, allowing us to momentarily escape from life's challenges and enjoy the present moment.

Drawing, Painting, or Sculpting: Unleashing Creativity

Art has long been recognized as a powerful form of therapy and self-expression. Drawing, painting, or sculpting can be used to express emotions, anxieties, and fears that words may fail to capture. Engaging in these creative activities can provide a means of communication, especially for individuals who struggle to express themselves verbally.

Art therapy has been shown to alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety, making it an effective tool in mental health treatment. Creating art fosters work planning and execution, self-sufficiency, and self-reflection techniques. It allows individuals to cope with stress, heal emotional trauma, and establish a deeper understanding of themselves.

Even if you believe you have no artistic talent, allowing yourself to express your thoughts and ideas through visual arts can be highly beneficial. "Creating a regular outlet for self-expression through visual arts or sculpting can help individuals find an emotional language of expression," says Dr. Howard Liu, an adult, child, and adolescent psychiatrist.

Creative Writing: A Journey of Self-Discovery

Writing, particularly creative writing, can be a powerful tool for self-reflection and personal growth. Journaling, poetry, and autobiographical writing offer opportunities for storytelling and narrative, enabling us to understand our emotions and increase our self-efficacy.

Numerous studies have explored the effects of writing on mental health. Writing down negative events and how we dealt with them, as well as recording positive events, can have a significant impact on our well-being. Writing allows us to make meaning out of our experiences, fostering emotional healing and self-discovery.

Creative writing is just one of the many creative activities that can benefit our mental health. Engaging in any activity outside of our daily routine can improve our overall well-being. Creative activities serve as healthy distractions, allowing us to prioritize our emotional well-being and enjoy moments of respite from life's challenges.

Considering all of this, engaging in creative activities offers a multitude of benefits for our mental health and happiness. As we learned, listening to music can regulate emotions and reduce stress, while solving puzzles exercises our mind and enhances cognitive function. Singing, dancing, drawing, painting, sculpting, and creative writing all provide unique avenues for self-expression, emotional release, and personal growth.

Make it a priority to incorporate creative activities into your daily life. Dedicate time to indulge in the activities that bring you joy and allow you to express yourself. Embrace the power of creativity and witness the transformative impact it can have on your mental health and overall well-being.



CHICKEN EGGPLANT PARMESAN



INGREDIENTS

Eggplant: Peel and dice one small eggplant into quarter-inch pieces.

Marinara: Use good-quality or homemade marinara sauce.

Salt: To season the chicken.

Chicken: Four small boneless, skinless chicken breasts, weighing about six ounces each.

Egg: One large egg, beaten.

Panko: Seasoned panko is preferred to save time and use fewer ingredients. If you only have regular panko, you can add Italian herbs, onion powder, and garlic powder.

Cheese: Thinly slice six ounces of fresh mozzarella.

Basil: Chop fresh basil for garnishing.

Are you looking for a flavorful and nutritious twist on a classic dish? Look no further than Chicken Eggplant Parmesan! This flavorful recipe combines breaded and air-fried (or baked) chicken breast with a simple eggplant marinara sauce and fresh mozzarella. Not only is it high in protein, but it's also incredibly delicious.

A Healthy and Lighter Alternative

If you're looking for a lighter version of the classic chicken parmesan, this recipe is perfect for you. It uses minimal oil and less cheese compared to traditional recipes, making it a healthier option. Additionally, the addition of eggplant to the sauce provides extra servings of vegetables, adding to the nutritional value of the dish.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 piece, Calories: 473 kcal, Carbohydrates: 26.5 g, Protein: 52 g, Fat: 16 g, Saturated Fat: 7.5 g, Cholesterol: 204.5 mg, Sodium: 742 mg, Fiber: 2.5 g, Sugar: 7.5 g



INSTRUCTIONS



1. Step 1: Prep the Chicken

Start by pounding the thicker end of the chicken breasts to ensure even thickness. Then, pound the entire breast to a half-inch thickness and season with salt. This step ensures that the chicken cooks evenly and has a tender texture.

2. Step 2: Dredge the Chicken

Prepare two large shallow bowls - one with beaten egg and the other with panko breadcrumbs. Dip each chicken breast into the beaten egg, allowing the excess to drip off, and then coat it in the breadcrumbs. This process creates a crispy and flavorful exterior for the chicken.

3. Step 3: Prepare the Eggplant Marinara

In a large deep skillet, heat the marinara sauce over medium-low heat until it simmers. Once it reaches a simmer, add the diced eggplant to the sauce and cook for approximately five to six minutes or until the eggplant becomes soft. This step infuses the sauce with the flavors of the eggplant, enhancing the overall taste of the dish.

4. Step 4: Air Fry the Chicken

If you have an air fryer, this is the time to use it. Spray the breaded chicken breasts with olive oil and place them in the air fryer basket. Air fry the chicken at 370°F for approximately five minutes on each side until they turn golden brown. Repeat this process with the remaining chicken breasts.

5. Step 5: Melt the Cheese

Once the chicken is cooked, place foil in the air fryer basket and transfer the cooked chicken back into the basket. Top each chicken breast with the eggplant marinara sauce and fresh mozzarella slices. Air fry for approximately three minutes or until the cheese is melted and bubbly. Repeat this step with the remaining chicken breasts.

6. Step 6: Garnish and Serve

Before serving, garnish the Chicken Eggplant Parmesan with freshly chopped basil. The vibrant green basil adds a pop of color and freshness to the dish. Serve the chicken hot and enjoy!

FEATURED EXERCISE

<https://barbend.com/upper-body-kettlebell-exercises/#BOR>

Featured Exercise ► Kettlebell Bent-Over Row

» Do it:

The kettlebell bent-over row is a compound exercise that engages multiple muscle groups simultaneously. By targeting the middle back, biceps, and shoulders, this exercise helps improve posture, strengthen the upper body, and enhance overall athletic performance. Unlike traditional bent-over rows that use barbells or dumbbells, the kettlebell bent-over row adds an extra challenge due to the kettlebell's unique shape, requiring greater stabilization and coordination.

1. Hinge at the hips, keeping your back straight, and lower your torso until it's almost parallel to the ground.
2. Engage your core and pull the kettlebell towards your ribcage by retracting your shoulder blade.
3. Pause for a brief moment at the top of the movement, squeezing your back muscles.
4. Slowly lower the kettlebell back to the starting position, maintaining control throughout the movement.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Rounded back: Maintain a neutral spine throughout the exercise to prevent strain on your lower back.

Jerking motions: Avoid using momentum to lift the kettlebell. Focus on a controlled and smooth movement.

Poor scapular retraction: Ensure you fully engage your back muscles by retracting your shoulder blades at the top of the movement.



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Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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