



READ TIME:
3 MINUTES

Mindfulness

By Lydia Schillinger

Have you been outside walking, going for a run or a bike ride and your thoughts get lost in the smell of fresh air, the warm breeze on your face, the rustle of the leaves in the trees, the sun on your skin and the sound of the pavement? If so, your brain is promoting new thought patterns and you are being mindful. Being mindful is bringing awareness to the present moment. This presence and awareness are the foundation to changing a thought pattern. May is Mental Health month and Cycling month and we have many reasons right now for a need to stay happy, energized and focused. Getting outdoors to ride a bike is one way we may achieve mindfulness which is good for your mental health. For other ways to be mindful check out the [Mayo Clinic website](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/mental-health/in-depth/mindfulness/art-20044783). Below are a few mindfulness exercises:

- **Pay attention.** It's hard to slow down and notice things in a busy world. Try to take the time to experience your environment with all your senses — touch, sound, sight, smell and taste. For example, when you eat a favorite food, take the time to smell, taste and truly enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment.** Try to intentionally bring an open, accepting and discerning attention to everything you do. Find joy in simple pleasures.
- **Accept yourself.** Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.
- **Focus on your breathing.** When you have negative thoughts, try to sit down, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Sitting and breathing for even just a minute can help.

To help with mindfulness, try out a meditation app. I particularly enjoy the [Calm](https://www.calm.com/) app. It has a few free features, or you may choose to pay for more options. [Head Space](https://www.headspace.com/) is another mindful app. Check them out! There are a lot of apps out there to help you sleep more, stress less and live better.

If you enjoy exercising as a way to be mindful, check out the article written by Selene Yeager, [Cycling is One of the Best Activities You Can Do to Banish a Bad Day](https://www.verywellmind.com/cycling-is-one-of-the-best-activities-you-can-do-to-banish-a-bad-day-5085878). She references a cross-sectional research study that analyzed the association between physical exercise and mental health in 1.2 million individuals in the USA between 2011 and 2015.

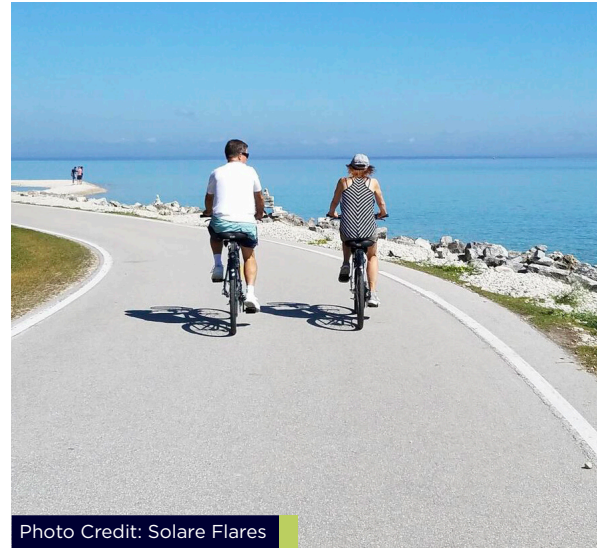


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Of the 75 types of exercise studied to show an increase in mental health, playing team sports ranked first, cycling was second, the third was aerobic or gym exercising and the fourth was running.

Except for team sports, the other top three ways to improve mental health may be done alone or with others*. Cycling is one way to enjoy mindfulness. Cycling can sharpen your mood and improve your thinking. Repetitive movement has a relaxing effect on the brain. Whether you are going for a walk or cycling, the repetitive movement is good for your soul.

According to Bill Bones Bike Law, here are the Top 7 Mental Health Benefits of Cycling:

- **Reduces stress**
- **Reduces risk of depression**
- **Helps you sleep better**
- **Improves your memory**
- **Helps you feel good**
- **Improves creative thinking**
- **Helps boost productivity**

Which activity will you choose to achieve mindfulness?

*During this pandemic if you are enjoying the great outdoors with others be sure to follow state guidelines for social distancing. ■