

WHY HOBBIES ARE GOOD FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Hobbies aren't just about having fun; they can also support your well-being. Research suggests that hobbies help support good mental health and can even reduce symptoms of stress, depression, and/or anxiety for some people. Below are five research-backed hobbies that can support your well-being, along with simple ways to try each one.

Creating art

Creating art, like painting, drawing, and crafting, can help people work through their emotions, get out of thought loops, and feel proud of their creations. These activities are also great at reducing stress. One experiment showed that even one 45-minute art-making session helped reduce stress hormone (cortisol) levels in 75% of participants.

Try it today

- Choose your art activity and gather your supplies.
- Set a timer for 15–30 minutes.
- Focus on process, not perfection. If you don't know where to start, make a big scribble on some paper and then color in the sections. Or make a messy sketch, draw abstract shapes, or cut out pictures to make a collage.
- Think about how you felt while you were creating.

Reading

Research shows that reading almost every day was linked to a lower risk of depression, lower loneliness, fewer difficulties with cognitive impairment and daily functioning, and overall better well-being.

Try it today

- Pick something to read. If it feels hard to focus, try something short like a magazine article.
- Set aside a specific amount of time that you want to spend reading, or commit to trying to read a certain number of pages.

Writing

Writing can help you organize your thoughts and feelings so you can better understand and deal with them. Writing about positive experiences, goals, and strengths was shown to improve mood in people with and without health conditions. The same study showed that expressive writing about thoughts and feelings associated with traumatic experiences helped people gain insight and clarity about what they had been through.

Try it today

- Set aside a specific amount of time for writing, and if you want, set a timer.
- Grab some paper, [a nice new journal](#), or open up a new doc on your phone or computer.
- Start writing. You can jot down whatever thoughts pop into your mind or use prompts.

Making or listening to music

Listening to and creating music can help your mind relax, lower stress, and improve your mood. A [review of studies on music and mental health](#) shows that people who engage with music regularly often report feeling better emotionally and more connected to others. [The same review](#) shows that music activities can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Try it today

- Make a playlist that matches your current mood, or the mood you want to be in.
- Sing or hum along to songs you like – even quietly in public.
- Try creating music by drumming to a beat with your hands, or experimenting with sounds.
- Find a group to sing with. Look into choirs or start a monthly karaoke meetup.

Gardening

Gardening can lower stress and boost mood by combining gentle focus, caring for something living, and gradual daily progress. Studies have found that [people who do gardening activities report higher well-being scores than those who don't](#), and that plant-related activities can help [reduce symptoms of depression](#).

Try it today

If you need a plant:

- Gather supplies – buy a pot and soil, or use a cup and dirt from outside.
- Find your plant – buy seeds or a plant, or keep it simple with green onions in water.

Once you have a plant:

- Check the soil and add water if needed.
- If it's a potted plant, rotate it for even growth.
- Trim dead leaves.
- Repeat every few days.

If having good days feels hard, know that help is available and that you are not alone.

Check on your mental health with a free, quick, anonymous test at mhascreening.org.

Explore additional resources and tools for more good days at mhanational.org/may.