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## Stronger Together: Building Mental and Physical Health Side by Side

When you move your body, you're not just building physical strength, you're supporting your mental well-being, too. Physical activity and mental health are closely connected, each influencing the other in powerful ways. Regular movement, like walking, stretching, or strength training, can help reduce stress, improve mood, and boost energy levels. It encourages the release of endorphins — often called “feel-good” chemicals — that can leave you feeling more positive and focused.

At the same time, taking care of your mental health can make it easier to stay active. When you feel less stressed and more motivated, you're more likely to stick with healthy habits like daily movement. Even short bursts of activity throughout the day — like a quick walk, a stretch break, or a few minutes of deep breathing — can help clear your mind and improve your outlook.

Many benefits of physical activity are cumulative, meaning that you'll have to stick with it for awhile before you notice a difference. Regular exercise improves muscle strength, it improves cardiovascular and respiratory health, strengthens your immune system and improves gut health. All of these physical health benefits, in turn, will improve mental health as they are interconnected.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet also contributes significantly to physical and mental health, and is one of the most important risk factors of illness. Rather than struggling to figure out which trending superfood to eat or which diet plan to follow, stick with a few basic principles of good nutrition and don't stress about it. Here is some basic advice:

- Drink more water. Any safe drinking water will hydrate you.

- Eat more fruits and veggies. Any fresh produce is good for you. Just make sure there is not a lot of added sugar or salt with canned and frozen options.
- Be mindful of processed foods. Learn to read labels. Foods that are minimally processed and ready-made can have a surprising amount of salt and sugar, even if they seem like they should be healthy, like bread or soup.

As you continue your Walk Kansas journey, remember that every step supports both your body and your mind. Taking time to move and eating healthfully isn't just about fitness — it's an investment in your overall well-being.



## Walk Kansas Learning Lounge

**Webinar time: Wednesdays at 12:10p.m. (room opens at 12, noon)**

**May 6: Kindness at Work**



**Link to join or scan the QR code:**

[ksu.zoom.us/j/92803723573](https://ksu.zoom.us/j/92803723573)

**All webinars will be recorded.**

## Refuel You: Why Self-Care Isn't Selfish

Self-care isn't just an occasional treat, it's a daily commitment to your overall well-being. Taking care of your physical, mental, emotional, and even spiritual health helps you manage stress, stay energized, and show up fully for the people and activities that matter most. Simply put, self-care is not a luxury — it's essential.

Practicing regular self-care supports both mind and body. Healthy habits like balanced nutrition, quality sleep, and regular movement can lower your risk for chronic conditions such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes, while also improving mood, focus, and resilience. Simple strategies like walking, stretching, deep breathing, or spending time outdoors can help reduce stress and boost your immune system.

Self-care also plays an important role in preventing burnout — especially for caregivers and those in helping roles. When your own needs are met, you're better equipped to care for others in a sustainable way.

Getting started doesn't have to be complicated. Begin by checking in with your current health, identifying sources of stress, and choosing healthy ways to cope. Small, consistent steps — like taking a daily walk, preparing nutritious meals, or setting boundaries — can make a big difference over time.

The bottom line: self-care is the foundation for living well. By making it a regular part of your routine, you can build strength, reduce stress, and create a more balanced, healthy life.

## From Prep to Plate: Simplifying Nutritious Meals

Healthy eating doesn't have to be complicated or time-consuming. With a little planning and a few smart strategies, you can move from prep to plate with less stress and more confidence — making nutritious meals a realistic part of your daily routine.

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Start by keeping it simple. You don't need elaborate recipes to eat well. Aim to build meals around a few basic components: lean protein, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and healthy fats. Think grilled chicken with roasted vegetables and brown rice, or a quick stir-fry packed with colorful veggies and beans. Simple combinations can deliver big nutrition.

Planning ahead is one of the best ways to save time and stay on track. Take a few minutes each week to map out meals, create a grocery list, and prep ingredients in advance. Washing and chopping vegetables, cooking a batch of grains, or portioning out snacks can make healthy choices the easiest choice when time is tight.

Don't forget the power of shortcuts. Pre-washed greens, frozen vegetables, canned beans, and rotisserie chicken can all help you get a nutritious meal on the table quickly. These options are convenient, affordable, and still packed with nutrients.

Batch cooking is another helpful strategy. Preparing larger portions and saving leftovers for later in the week reduces time in the kitchen and helps prevent last-minute, less nutritious choices. Even cooking just one or two extra servings can make a difference.

Finally, give yourself flexibility. Not every meal has to be perfect. Focus on progress, not perfection, and celebrate small wins — like adding an extra serving of vegetables or cooking at home one more night this week.

By simplifying your approach, you can make nutritious eating easier, more enjoyable, and sustainable. Small steps from prep to plate can lead to big benefits for your health and energy.

This Beef and Broccoli Stir Fry includes more veggies! Edamame are young soybeans harvested before they ripen or harden. They are an excellent source of fiber and protein.



## Beef and Broccoli Stir Fry

Serve over steamy brown rice.

*Makes 5 Servings*

### Ingredients:

- 1 pound flank steak, sliced into thin, bite-sized strips
- 2 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil, divided
- 1 pound fresh broccoli, cut into florets (about 6 cups)
- 1½ cups mushrooms, sliced ¼ inch thick
- 1 cup frozen edamame beans, thawed

### Sauce ingredients:

- 1 teaspoon fresh ginger, grated
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic (3 cloves)
- ½ cup hot water
- 6 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1½ tablespoons corn starch
- 2 tablespoons sesame oil
- Dash pepper

### Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Prepare steak by slicing thinly against the grain. For easier slicing, freeze steak for 30 minutes prior to slicing.
3. Combine all stir-fry sauce ingredients in a bowl and set aside.
4. Place a large skillet over medium heat and add 1 tablespoon oil. Add broccoli florets and mushrooms; sauté for 6 to 7 minutes, stirring or tossing several times. Broccoli should be bright green and crisp-tender. Add edamame after other veggies have cooked for several minutes. Remove vegetable mixture and place in a bowl to hold.
5. Increase heat to high and add 1 tablespoon of oil to skillet. Add beef in a single layer and sauté for 2 minutes per side, or until cooked through.
6. Reduce heat to medium/low and add vegetables to meat. Add the sauce and gently toss as sauce thickens. Add 1 to 2 tablespoons water to thin the sauce if desired.

**Nutrition Information per serving:** 135 calories; 19 g total fat (4 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat); 22 g carbohydrates; 10 g sugar; 30 g protein; 7 g fiber; 768 mg sodium.