

THE RUNNER'S HIGH

GOT THE BLUES? HERE'S HOW RUNNING CAN BOOST YOUR MOOD

THE DAYS WHEN YOU FEEL the least like running are the days you need it the most, says Andrea Dunn, Ph.D., a research scientist and the lead author of a recent study on exercise and mood published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. "If you're stressed out, you probably have some of the symptoms of depression, even if you don't meet the clinical standard," says Dunn. "People who exercise regularly have less anxiety and have improved well-being."

The good news: It doesn't require much effort to reap the rewards of exercise. While the American College of Sports Medicine recommends working out three to five days a week for 30 to 45 minutes to ensure good physical health, studies show that shorter bursts of activity can positively impact your emotional state. In fact, just 10 minutes of pedaling at a moderate pace on a stationary bike is enough to boost mood, according to research from the Centers for the Advancement of Health at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff.

But runners get an even bigger payoff: Sustained high-intensity exercise, specifically running, appears to have extra benefits, especially where stress and anxiety are concerned. A team of researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia measured anxiety levels of female runners, ages 18 to 20 and 35 to 45, before and after 33 minutes of moderate or high-intensity exercise. The women who ran at 80 percent of maximum aerobic capacity (a slightly faster pace than would allow you to carry on a conversation with your running partner) were found to have experienced the sharpest decline in anxiety. What's more, the anxiety relief continued at least 90 minutes after they had stopped exercising.

To keep the positive effects coming, you've got to keep running. If you think you can bank the mood-boosting benefits of the sport, you'll be disappointed. Researchers at the University of California-San Diego followed 944 residents who exercised at least three times a week in the 1980s then became sedentary during the following decade. They found that the lapsed exercisers had mood scores similar to individuals who had never exercised at all. —JENNIFER PIRTLE



DESERT STORM Lisa in the 2004 Marathon des Sables.