



Health

INSIDE: ASK THE EXPERT: WHAT CAN I DO IF I HIT A PLATEAU?
+ HOW STRESS CAN AFFECT YOUR HORMONES

Why hobbies are a health & happiness kick

Far from being a nice-but-not-necessary part of life, taking up a hobby might just deliver some wellness benefits





W

hen did you last devote some of your downtime to a hobby, rather than catching up on Netflix, phoning a friend for a chat or

finding something that needs doing around the house? Although these are all good things to do, making the effort to spend a bit of your leisure time enjoying a hobby can be good for your health. A study published in 2016 found that people who actively pursued a hobby were more likely to live longer, healthier lives. Research has also shown that spending at least 100 hours a year—that's roughly two hours a week—on an artistic hobby is linked to better mental health and well-being. And, according to a study published in a British Psychological Society journal, spending some leisure time 'doing' a hobby might even help you perform better during your day job, too.



Kendra V.
WW member

What's so good about hobbies?

One explanation for some of the health benefits linked to having a hobby is that they provide us with a source of something called eustress.

It turns out there are at least two different types of stress—a negative variety, called distress, and the positive or good type, called eustress ('eu' means 'good' in Greek).

The two trigger some of the exact same physical responses in our bodies, including the release of hormones like cortisol, but with very different effects.

Distress typically occurs when you

encounter something that you consider to be a threat in some way, particularly if the threat hangs around. This can lead to feelings of worry and anxiety and the physical symptoms you probably associate with the word 'stress', like interrupted sleep patterns, headaches and an upset stomach.

On the other hand, something that presents a challenge instead of a threat for you will trigger eustress, a short-lived physical stress response, which can be energising, motivating and fatigue-fighting.

It can even be a great chance for your

brain and body to practise how it responds to stress, which helps build resilience to distress.

In fact, research shows that when your brain experiences eustress regularly, the section responsible for processing emotions and dealing with stress grows physically bigger.

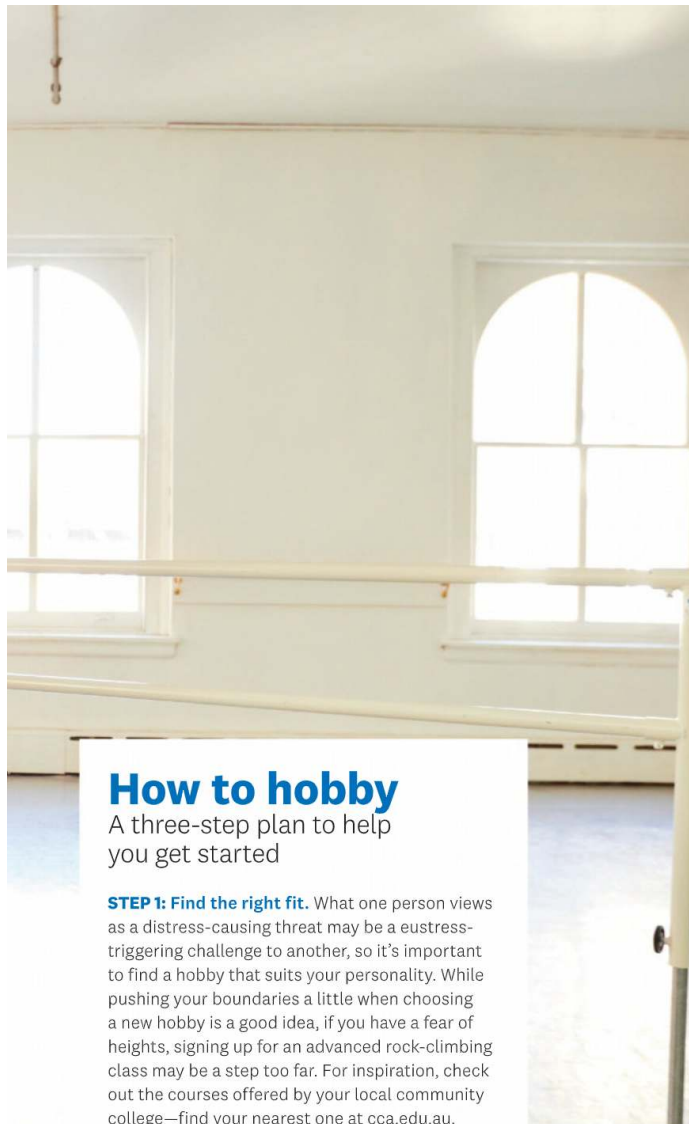
While one person's 'challenge' can definitely be another person's 'threat', experts tend to agree that learning a new hobby equals 'challenge'—and therefore the ideal get-a-hit-of-eustress opportunity—for most of us.



23 Apr 2019
Article type: Publication
Page: 82
Weight Watchers
Readership: 79000
AVE: \$28665
Circulation: 37511

This copy is licensed by Copyright Agency for the purposes of a Press Clipping Service. Any reuse of this article must be licensed: www.rightsportal.com.au

page 3 of 3



How to hobby

A three-step plan to help you get started

STEP 1: Find the right fit. What one person views as a distress-causing threat may be a eustress-triggering challenge to another, so it's important to find a hobby that suits your personality. While pushing your boundaries a little when choosing a new hobby is a good idea, if you have a fear of heights, signing up for an advanced rock-climbing class may be a step too far. For inspiration, check out the courses offered by your local community college—find your nearest one at cca.edu.au.

STEP 2: Carve out some time. Finding some consistent space in your life for a hobby means making it a priority. Actively choose when, where and how you'll spend some time with your new hobby, and make that time an 'appointment' in your diary so it actually happens.

STEP 3: Look for opportunities to 'up the ante'. A big part of evoking eustress is that all-important challenge. So don't let your hobby become ho-hum. You don't have to take up a brand new hobby every few months. Simply embarking on a new project, actively adding to your skill set, or exploring a new environment or area, depending on whether your hobby is arty or active or done indoors or out, can produce a fresh challenge.

Health

5 Healthy hobbies

The 'best' hobby is one you're genuinely interested in doing, but if you're looking for a new one, consider this handful of suggestions. Not only can they deliver a dose of eustress thanks to the mental and physical challenges they provide, they have a few other health benefits, too. Try learning:

1

To dance

A study conducted by Sydney-based researchers in 2016 found that people over the age of 40 who dance regularly significantly lower their risk of heart disease, most likely because dancing offers both physical and social perks.

2

Photography

Use your new hobby to get outside and snap nature-rich photos, and you'll be happier and more socially connected as a result.

3

To play golf

A review of 5000 golf-related studies confirms that playing golf may improve everything from heart to respiratory health and may even reduce the risk of experiencing anxiety, depression and dementia. The study also found that you'll walk up to 12 kilometres during an 18-hole golf game.

4

To play an instrument

The long-term brain benefits of doing this as a child have been confirmed by numerous studies, but don't panic if you missed that boat—learning to play an instrument pays off at any age. Research performed at the Western Sydney University's MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development found that the brain processing speeds of people aged over 65 improved after just six weeks of piano lessons.

5

Something artistic, like painting, drawing or making pottery

Research shows that after every 45-minute session, you'll not only be in a better mood, your self-confidence will have improved, too, regardless of your skill level. 