

A Natural High
A Collection of Readings and Resources

A **Natural High** is a high that is achieved through an experience, activity or mindset that releases chemicals in the brain called endorphins, which help us feel good, reduce stress and can increase our energy. A **Natural High** is not induced by the use of alcohol, marijuana or drugs. The best thing about a **Natural High** is that it belongs to the individuals themselves and not to the chemical.

The problem with depending on a substance, no matter what it is, it then becomes the route to feeling good or high. Many of the activities that one does when high are learned in that state of being. Over time, the high, the accomplishment, the fun times, and social events become associated with the substance. The substance gets the credit for the high or elated experience. Not the Individual.

One does not have to depend on, or get high on a chemical to feel good, have fun, be social or relax.

Learning how to initiate a **Natural High** can support self-efficacy, self-esteem, and foster greater sense of awareness.

A **Natural High** can be learned at any time and it can be introduced as a new strategy to enhance health and cope with daily emotional and physical stress.

Humor, Laughter Yoga or Laughter Therapy

“Laughter therapy as a non-pharmacological, alternative treatment does not require specialized preparations such as suitable facilities and equipment, is not prohibited by cost, does not depend on when or where it happens, and is easily accessible and acceptable... Laughter therapy gives our body various physiological changes, and has an influence on the physical temperature, blood pressure, lung capacity, heart rate, muscles in the musculoskeletal system, and brain activity, so it can have an overall effect in promoting health (Hayashi et al. 2007; Bennett and Lengacher 2009). Mentally, laughter therapy helps reduce unpleasant feelings such as tension, anxiety, hatred, and anger, alleviates feelings of depression, aids better interpersonal relationships, and improves insomnia, memory failure, and dementia (Takeda et al. 2010; Bains et al. 2015). Laughter is a positive sensation, and seems to be a useful and healthy way to overcome stress. Decreasing stress-making hormones found in the blood, laughter can mitigate the effects of stress (Farifteh et al. 2014). There is also an opinion that laughter is a pleasant stress, which means laughter is a stress that has a positive aspect and gives fresh and powerful energy. Thus, laughter is used to reduce negative cognitive responses and relieves stress (Bennett 2003; MacDonald 2004). Therefore, it is effective and scientifically supported as either a single or adjuvant therapy. At the same time, it can also provide a comprehensive approach that can improve the quality of life and social relationships”

To understand the benefits of laughter and learn more; [Therapeutic Benefits of Laughter in Mental Health: A Theoretical Review](#)

In an article, *Laughter is the Best Medicine*, it declares, “Laughter is good for your health

Laughter relaxes the whole body. A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.

Laughter boosts the immune system. Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.

Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.

Laughter protects the heart. Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

Laughter burns calories. OK, so it's no replacement for going to the gym, but one study found that laughing for 10 to 15 minutes a day can burn approximately 40 calories—which could be enough to lose three or four pounds over the course of a year.

Laughter lightens anger's heavy load. Nothing diffuses anger and conflict faster than a shared laugh. Looking at the funny side can put problems into perspective and enable you to move on from confrontations without holding onto bitterness or resentment.

Laughter may even help you to live longer. A study in Norway found that people with a strong sense of humor outlived those who don't laugh as much. The difference was particularly notable for those battling cancer”

To learn more about the mental, physical and social benefits of laughter; [Laughter is the Best Medicine](#)

YouTube Video: [Laughter Yoga: Laughing Away the Stress](#)

[Maine Laughter Yoga Facebook page](#)

Music

Music Therapy is a recognized therapeutic profession. It is used in many different ways with wide variety of populations and ages. “The idea of music as a healing influence which could affect health and behavior is as least as old as the writings of Aristotle and Plato. The 20th century profession formally began after World War I and World War II when community musicians of all types, both amateur and professional, went to Veterans hospitals around the country to play for the thousands of veterans suffering both physical and emotional trauma from the wars. The patients' notable physical and emotional responses to music led the doctors and nurses to request the hiring of musicians by the hospitals. It was soon evident that the hospital musicians needed some prior training before entering the facility and so the demand grew for a college curriculum. To learn more: [History of Music Therapy](#)

“Music can be used to help people manage physical, emotional, or cognitive problems. The client can interact with the music in different ways such as listening, singing, or dancing to the beat. They can also write songs or discuss lyrics” [Music Therapy in Addiction Recovery](#)

Sober College lists several benefits of using music in addiction recovery;

“Music can help purge destructive emotions. During initial sobriety, many experience a range of emotions that can be overwhelming. Music provides a healthy outlet to express oneself.

Some may struggle with managing their stress levels early in recovery. Music can reduce stress.

Boredom can be a trigger for relapse, particularly among young adults. Listening to, analyzing, or creating music can help fill time and create new hobbies for someone to enjoy.

Music can help introduce people in recovery to meditation. It can be a first step for those who may not be accustomed to formal meditation practice.

Music therapy can reduce feelings of loneliness and depression. Especially in early recovery, many may express feelings of loneliness due to being away from familiar environments and peers. Music can help people feel connected to others and a little less alone” [How Music Can Help in the Recovery Process](#)

Drumming

In an article titled, Complimentary Therapy for Addiction by Michael Winkelman, PhD, MPH, he reports, “research reviews indicate that drumming enhances recovery through inducing relaxation and enhancing theta-wave production and brain-wave synchronization. Drumming produces pleasurable experiences, enhanced awareness of preconscious dynamics, release of emotional trauma, and reintegration of self. Drumming alleviates self-centeredness, isolation, and alienation, creating a sense of connectedness with self and others. Drumming provides a secular approach to accessing a higher power and applying spiritual perspectives. It has shown to be helpful in preventing repeated reoccurrences of use and effective when other counseling modalities have failed” Online: [Complimentary Therapy for Addiction](#)

Well-being and Mental Health has also seen improvement through Drumming. “Research on well-being has reflected two complementary approaches, broadly referred to as the hedonic and eudaimonic traditions. The hedonic tradition typically places centrality on pleasurable experiences as the pathway to happiness. Well-being is concerned with the balance between positive affect and negative affect, along with perceived satisfaction with one’s life. The eudaimonic tradition advocates that virtue and the fulfilment of human potential and self-realization are at the core of well-being” (Int J Qual Stud Health Well-being. 2018; 13(1): 1484219. Published online 2018 Jul 10. doi: 10.1080/17482631.2018.1484219)

In a study on group Drumming within a group six characteristics of well-being were met. These overarching themes include; Hedonia, Agency, Accomplishment, Engagement, Redefined Self, and Social Well-Being. To learn more: [Promoting well-being through group drumming with mental health service users and their careers](#)

[Make Music- Portland Maine](#)

[Maine Drumming Facebook page](#)

Mindfulness and Meditation

“Meditation is an ancient practice of centering attention of the mind on an anchor point, which often includes the rhythm of breathing or other parts of the body, while maintaining focus and overcoming the wandering of the mind to other thoughts or distractions.

Some of the goals of meditation include calming the mind to increase mental and physical relaxation, clarity of thought, and improving mental and physical health.

It is easier to explain than it is to maintain for more than a short period of time for most beginners. The human brain is like a super computer performing thousands of calculations, instructions, and perceptions every minute. It never turns off and we are constantly bombarded with a flurry of conscious and unconscious thoughts.

By concentrating on an anchor point such as breathing, and keeping the focus on one thing, it calms the mind. If attention moves to someplace else, such as paying bills or any type of distraction, make a mental note that the mind has wandered, recognize it, and gently bring attention back to the anchor point.

According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, [meditation increases physical relaxation and calmness](#). As a result, this practice may improve mental balance and help a person cope with stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

There are [many different types of ways to meditate](#), each with its own focus points.

Here are seven useful types of meditation that people practice:

1. Loving-Kindness: Focusing on specific people or objects to promote feelings of love towards that person or thing
2. Progressive Relaxation: Focusing on different parts of the body that need tension released
3. Mindfulness: Focusing on, and being aware of the present
4. Breath Awareness: Focusing on breathing and only breathing – a mental focus practice
5. Kundalini Yoga: Physical meditation that incorporates movement
6. Zen: A Buddhist practice that focuses on both breathing and mindfulness
7. Transcendental: A person-centered practice that focuses on rising above problems in a spiritual manner

Each type of meditation has something in common with the others, usually in the form of a quiet location, set body positions, and positive thoughts. Out of these seven practices, mindfulness meditation may have the most benefits for both the body and brain” To read this article:

[Mindfulness and Meditation for Recovery](#)

[Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction](#)

Exercise

Exercise is great for individuals who are in recovery from Substance Use Disorder and is also great in preventing substance misuse. "Exercise releases endorphins in the body, which in turn boost mood; it can create euphoric feelings and reduce negative feelings. Additionally, exercise aids the immune system, which can reverse some of the damage caused by drugs and alcohol. It improves circulation and strength and helps the individual sweat out toxins while simultaneously boosting energy levels. Since many individuals who struggle with addiction may also struggle with body image and self-esteem, improved physical appearance and overall functioning as a result of exercising can boost confidence. As an individual sets goals and works towards accomplishing them, their achievements serve as motivators and allow them to feel a sense of accomplishment as they overcome challenges.

Aside from the physical benefits, exercise provides a number of benefits for mental and emotional health. Physical fitness is an excellent outlet for stress, anger, and other emotions that may influence substance abuse. Exercise can also help individuals develop emotional intelligence and common interests with others. Some exercises provide team-building opportunities that promote the development of leadership and communication skills" Online: ([Sober College: School of Addiction Studies](#))

YouTube Video. This is an informative video which is 3:16 minutes in length which speaks to Natural Highs.

[The Science Of The Natural High With Matt Bellace, PhD](#)

[Sullivan Gym USM](#)

[Costello Fitness and Wellness USM](#)

Nature

"There is a healing power in nature that cannot be measured nor explained, yet it is very real. Time in the wilderness seems to have a healing effect on even the deepest wounds. It is no coincidence that most of the spiritual leaders and teachers throughout time have gone to the wilderness to find healing and purpose in preparation for their life's work. One of the gifts of the wilderness is the way it gives us an honest look at ourselves, our gifts, talents, weaknesses, character defects and our true potential are all made obvious. It is this honest look at ourselves that allows us to find love and acceptance for who we are and a vision of who we can become" Found online in Psychology Today: [Nature and Recovery](#)

[Maine Audubon](#)

[Maine State Parks](#)

Mindful Walking

The Incredible Power of Walking, published in the April 2020 issue of Prevention Magazine reported science based reasons to take up walking. The article listed three powerful reasons to consider walking as a preventive measure for good health.

1. Walking is an energy booster. People who walked 30 minutes a day, 5 days per week reported more energy, felt healthie and reported more confidence. **2.** Walking curbs sugar cravings. The article reported, "Walking can curb sugar cravings for sugary snacks, likely due to the endorphins physical activity releases. **3.** Better sleep. One study found that [people who took morning walks reported deeper sleep. **4.** Walking can keep you from getting a cold. "Among 1,002 study participants, just 20 minutes a day of aerobic exercise, 5 days per week resulted in 43% fewer days sick than those who only exercised once a week"

"Mindfulness is a practice that is becoming popular to reduce stress. One activity that almost anyone can do to moderate stress is mindful walking. Walking meditation is a way to practice moving without a goal or intention. For many, this is a more practical way to relax verses sitting quietly with our eyes closed. Mindful walking can help us be present in the moment and focus on the happenings around us.

Mindful walking simply means walking while being aware of each step and of our breath"

To learn more read this article from Michigan Stet University: [Stress less with mindful walking](#)

[Maine Trail Finder](#)

[Maine Walking Trails and Maps](#)

Altruism- Service and giving to others

The practices of moral virtue and altruistic behavior are important paths towards spiritual awareness and growth. As we pursue these ways of being we gradually become less self-centered and more connected in a harmonious way with ourselves, others, and the world...Service to others is another common principle and practice in relation to spiritual growth. Altruism and compassion are characteristics of being spiritually awakened, but also encourage its development. Service is a principle common to all of the major spiritual traditions.

Altruism is an expression of our empathic higher nature, and a connecting aspect of our humanity. It takes us outside of our fear based ego, and towards others with feelings of love, kindness, and compassion. Service to others leads to well-being and happiness within, by reducing our sense of isolation and separation. We feel increasingly fulfilled in our lives, developing a meaning and purpose.

If interested in this concept: [Morality, Altruism and Spiritual Growth](#)

[USM Service Learning](#)

[Volunteer Maine](#)

Other things you may want to try

Tai Chi

Yoga

Dance (any kind)

Volunteer

Board Games with friends

Group exercise

Hiking

Running

Swimming

Crafts

Check out [The ROCC at USM](#) for engaging activities and community

What's Your Natural High

Watch these Videos from Natural High:

[Why We Exist- Natural High](#)

[Bethany Hamilton- Pro Surfer](#)

[Terry Kennedy- Pro Skateboarder](#)

[Cassadee Pope- Singer and Songwriter- Winner of The Voice 2012](#)

For additional resources, check out USM's Wellness page:

[USM Prevention, Health and Wellness](#)

For Comments on this, newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact:

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