

# Blue Cross® VIRTUAL WELL-BEING

## Well-being benefits of arts and crafts

Studies show people who routinely engage in arts and crafts find stress relief and creative fulfillment benefits from those activities. Having a hobby has value beyond that activity's relationship to your job or productivity. Numerous studies show that developing and spending time enjoying a hobby isn't only a good break for your brain and body — there are also actual health benefits.

For example, a study from the University of California found that participating in hobbies provides immediate stress relief and lowers stress and depression symptoms in the long run. Hobbies with repetitive motions, such as sewing, knitting, gardening or writing with pen and paper, release the feel-good chemical dopamine in your brain. These repetitive hobbies have been compared to meditation due to their calming effect on the brain and body. In addition, various hobbies can:

- Decrease symptoms of dementia
- Give your mind a rest
- Help you process trauma
- Boost immunity
- Provide better connectivity between brain hemispheres
- Enhance memory
- Increase happiness
- Promote self-esteem



As an example of how hobbies can improve well-being, let's look at two in particular — knitting and reading.

Knitting can help people achieve a relaxed state that's usually only associated with meditation and yoga once they get past the initial learning curve. Studies have also found that knitting can bring relief to chronic pain, as it serves as a distraction. And because it gives their hands something to do, people have found that knitting can help them quit smoking, lose weight or even address an eating disorder. Knitting can also decrease the odds of age-related mild cognitive impairment.

Reading improves brain connectivity. Using MRI scans, researchers found that reading involves a complex network of circuits and signals in your brain. As your reading ability increases, those networks get stronger. Reading can also reduce stress, and lower your blood pressure and heart rate, fight symptoms of depression, prevent cognitive decline and contribute to a longer life.

How can you get started with a hobby? Here are some suggestions:

- Think about your childhood and what hobbies you enjoyed then.
- Make hobbies a requirement for yourself.
- Remember that you're learning and won't be perfect the first time you try something.
- Be open to experiencing joy whenever you can.

Sources: [scholarship.org](https://scholarship.org)\*, [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)\*, [link.springer.com](https://link.springer.com)\*

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