

Physical health improves students mental health

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UNC Asheville staff said improving physical health can be a powerful tool to battle mental health issues.

Kenda Mullert, UNCA's health promotion coordinator, said she encourages students to find one simple way to be healthy and be consistent about it every single day.

"If we can adopt a positive lifestyle, we can easily become more positive in our mental health, and that positive lifestyle physically could look so different for every person," Mullert said.

Jessie Lanning, a fitness trainer, spends her time advocating a healthy lifestyle for members of Urban Athletic Training Center in Canton.

"I've been consistently working out for five years. You are always going to have trouble with it, no matter if you're just starting or if it's five years down the line," Lanning said. "What you end up learning is that you don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to kill yourself to get results. You can just wake up and say, 'I'm going to be better.'"

Research at Andrews University showed significant increase in body mass among college students. Based on self-reported height and weight, being overweight or obese affects approximately 35 percent of U.S. college students.

Mullert said student health coaches provide assistance in managing stress and anxiety along with finding ways to incorporate exercise into students' busy schedules.

"The student health coach is able to hear the student and help them come up with a plan to improve their health that works best for them," Mullert said.

The health promotions coordinator says plans made for students involve semester specific solutions customized for each client that utilize resources on campus to find creative solutions that fitting the student's time and budget. She said

the Health and Counseling Center offers students a starting point to improve all areas of their life.

Lanning said she began working out in 2013 when her older sister invited her to the local gym.

"She asked me if I wanted to go to do it with her, and I can remember what I was doing. I was sitting on the couch eating chips, and I was like, 'Yeah, duh,'" Lanning said.

Lanning said her sister received a free two-week trial in the mail to bring a guest. Gyms frequently run specials for new members to get started without making a commitment.

"She would come home and talk about how cool it was. You do tire flips, climb the rope and all this cool stuff," Lanning said.

Mullert said our bodies and brains exist together in their functions, and our physical satisfaction connects to our mental health.

"Every time you finish the workout it reassures," Lanning said. "Just knowing that how I'm feeling right now has nothing to do with how much more I can do, and that just translates into every aspect of your life and you start looking for more ways to be a better person. You learn that the exercise isn't punishment."

Lanning, an avid gym-goer, said one does not have to go to the gym regularly to reap the rewards.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity a week, not necessarily in a gym.

"There was a lady I knew at the church I was going to who would just run. Whenever all of her thoughts were overflowing in her mind and she just needed time to get away, she would just go run and pray and she got great results from that," Lanning said.

Madeline Cohen, counselor and owner of Healing Well, a psychotherapeutic center in Asheville, sees the benefits of positive physical health as an aid to mental health



PHOTO BY KYE JOHNSON

Jessie Lanning increases her heart rate by doing her warm up routine at Urban Athletic Training Center.

issues in college students.

"You want to treat your body with the utmost respect. You want your body to be as healthy as it can, not because it looks good, but because it feels good, and it means

you have greater chance of longevity and sticking around to do good in the world," Cohen said.

The licensed counselor said a successful journey for students to-

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