

Channel All That Rage Into Your Workout

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When I was in high school, I was not particularly athletic. I sat the bench on the junior varsity baseball team and quit freshman basketball after two weeks.

And yet, I still wanted to find a sport that was right for me, so I got into rock climbing. I wasn't good at that either, but I loved the feeling it gave me. Climbing seemed to center me. On Friday I'd be a distracted mess of hormones and teen angst. On Sunday, I would dangle 80 feet off the ground, scared out of my gourd, and by Monday schoolwork just seemed easier. How did something so terrifying make the world feel less chaotic and stressful?

There is no doubt that exercise is [good for your heart](#) and [your mental health](#). Or that calming activities like yoga or tai chi can help you feel refreshed and recharged. But what about less calm activities? Is parkour jumping from a rooftop or slamming a tennis ball across the court good for the mind?

Traditional exercise psychologists might say no, because anything that spikes your stress hormones, be it through fear or aggression, is not good for mental health. Small studies have bolstered this belief; one suggested that racquetball's "competitive nature" [is less relaxing](#) than weight or circuit training, while another found that adding stress to a biking workout [hampers immune function](#). And certainly this Olympic year was a lesson in the [dangers of over-stressing](#) elite athletes on and off the field.

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