



# Social & Creative wellness

We Thrive Together



# Social Wellness

Social wellness refers to **the relationships we have and how we interact with others**. Our relationships can offer support during difficult times. Social wellness involves building healthy, nurturing, and supportive relationships as well as fostering a genuine connection with those around you.

From the time you're born, your relationships help you learn to navigate the world. You learn how to interact with others, express yourself, conduct everyday health habits, and be a part of different communities from those around you. Positive social habits can help you build support systems and stay healthier mentally and physically.



## Build Social Connections

Social connections might help protect health and lengthen life. Scientists are finding that our links to others can have powerful effects on our health. Whether with family, friends, neighbors, romantic partners, or others, social connections can influence our biology and well-being.

Look for ways to get involved with others.

# To find new social connections:

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- Join a group focused on a favorite hobby, such as reading, hiking, painting, or wood carving.
  - Learn something new. Take a cooking, writing, art, music, or computer class.
  - Take a class in yoga, tai chi, or another new physical activity.
  - Join a choral group, theater troupe, band, or orchestra.
  - Help with gardening at a community garden or park.
  - Volunteer at a school, library, hospital, or place of worship.
  - Participate in neighborhood events, like a park clean-up through your local recreation center or community association.
  - Get active in your community. Helping others can reduce feelings of loneliness.
  - Travel to different places and meet new people.





# Build Healthy Relationships

Strong, healthy relationships are important throughout your life. They can impact your mental and physical well-being. As a child you learn the social skills you need to form and maintain relationships with others. But at any age you can learn ways to improve your relationships. It's important to know what a healthy relationship looks like and how to keep your connections supportive.

# To build healthy relationships:

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- Recognize how [other people influence you](#).
- Share your feelings honestly.
- Ask for what you need from others.
- Listen to others without judgement or blame. Be caring and empathetic.
- Disagree with others respectfully. Conflicts should not turn into personal attacks.
- Avoid being overly critical, angry outbursts, and violent behavior.
- Expect others to treat you with respect and honesty in return.
- Compromise. Try to come to agreements that work for everyone.
- Protect yourself from violent and abusive people. Set boundaries with others. Decide what you are and aren't willing to do. It's okay to say no.
- Learn the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive ways of relating to others.  
Visit [www.thehotline.org/healthy-relationships/relationship-spectrum](http://www.thehotline.org/healthy-relationships/relationship-spectrum)



# Creative Wellness

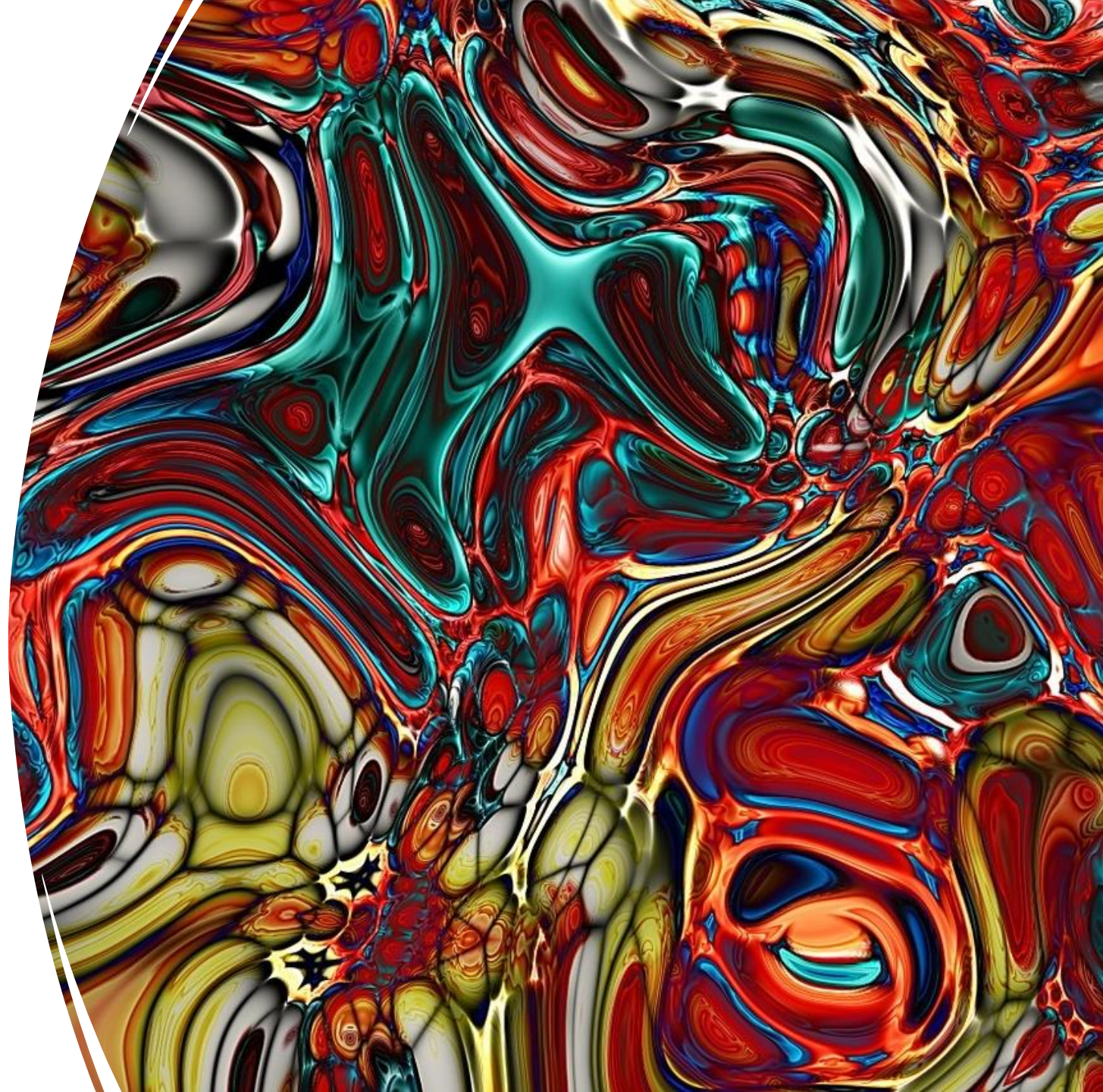
Expressing yourself through the arts can be one of the more enjoyable components of an overall wellness plan, as well as a social opportunity. According to the American Public Health Association, engagement with artistic activities, either as an observer or a creator, can enhance a person's mood, emotions, and other positive psychological states and have a salient impact on important health parameters.



Creativity has long been thought of as a key piece of the wellness puzzle. A review of more than 100 studies of the benefits of the arts (music, visual arts, dance, and writing) found that creative expression has a powerful impact on health and well being among various patient populations. Most of the studies agree that engagement in the arts decreases depressive symptoms, increases positive emotions, reduces stress, and, in some cases, improves immune system functioning.

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Other studies found that creative works and exposure to the arts can impact conditions like Parkinson's disease and some forms of dementia and cancer. Creative wellness is good for your intellectual wellness, too. A study by the Mayo Clinic found that people who engage in activities like painting, drawing, sculpting, and crafts (woodworking, pottery, ceramics, quilting) in middle age and older may delay cognitive decline. When studying people in their mid- to late 80s, researchers have found that the behavior with the greatest protective effect against cognitive decline was artistic activity.





Many people miss out on the joy of creative expression because they fear they're not "talented" or that they're not good at a particular activity. But if you can let go of the need to be good at something, you can have a lot of fun. If you want to play a new sport, you probably have to learn from the beginning and practice for a long time, and the same is true for most artistic endeavors. So don't be disappointed if you can't pick up a flute and play it right away, or dance a complicated routine in your first class. Remind yourself that it's okay to be a beginner. Pick an area of creative expression that looks fun to you, and try to just enjoy it without judging yourself.

# We are all creative

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- Give yourself permission to be a beginner.
- Learning to let yourself create is like learning to walk. The artist child must begin by crawling. Baby steps will follow...it is necessary to go gently and slowly.
- We are far more colorful, far more creative, and far more charismatic than we know.
- With art, we [are]...more truly ourselves, and those selves are colorful and beautiful.





## How to be Creatively Well

Art, music, dance, writing, and drama are considered the traditional healing arts, but you can seek out dozens of creative pursuits as part of a wellness plan to help you lower stress, cope with a loss, form new connections, and simply be happier. Here are some things you can do to weave creative wellness principles into even the busiest schedule:

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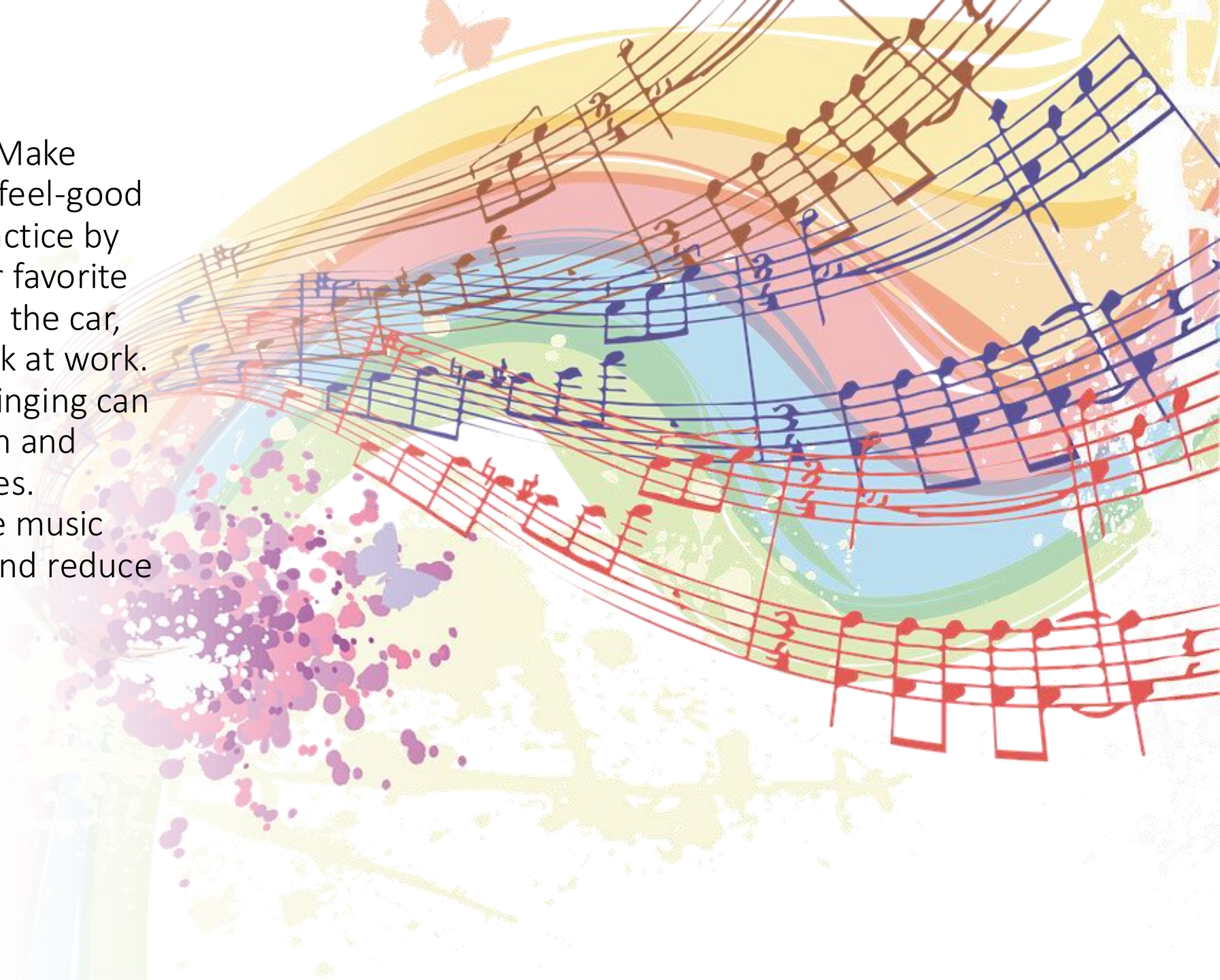
**Join an art or pottery class.** While you learn something new and enjoy artistic activity, you also may benefit from social interaction with others and the chance to make new friends. Many venues stress that no talent or experience is necessary to participate.

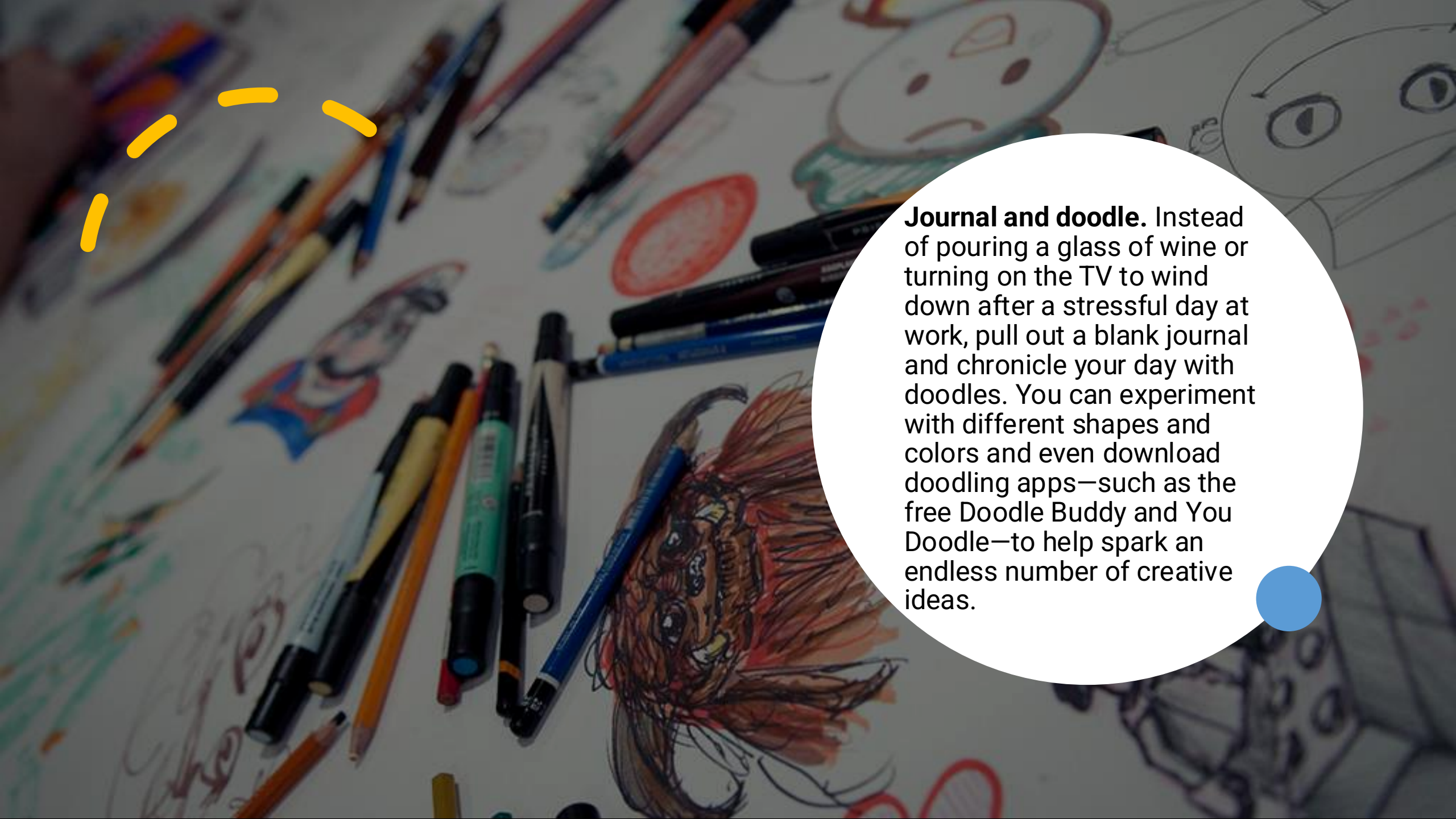




**Try dance.** Dancing is known as a stress reliever that releases endorphins, and it can be a good workout, too. If you're nervous about trying to pirouette or bust a move in front of a group of strangers, buy an instructional video or find one online and give it a whirl at home. Mix dancing in with your workout routine to fight off monotony or join a class with other beginners to form connections

**Use the magic of music.** Make releasing more of those feel-good endorphins a regular practice by belting out some of your favorite tunes, whether you're in the car, the shower, or on a break at work. It's been reported that singing can help ease muscle tension and decrease stress hormones. Listening to your favorite music also can help you relax and reduce stress.






**Journal and doodle.** Instead of pouring a glass of wine or turning on the TV to wind down after a stressful day at work, pull out a blank journal and chronicle your day with doodles. You can experiment with different shapes and colors and even download doodling apps—such as the free Doodle Buddy and You Doodle—to help spark an endless number of creative ideas.

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**Express yourself through poetry and writing.** Expressing your thoughts in new ways can be a cathartic exercise. Try poetry to communicate your feelings, especially during times when you need closure or are trying to understand an insecurity. Writing, in general, is one of the great healing arts. A simple daily diary can help you release feelings onto a page instead of keeping them bottled up inside.





**Try drama.** Acting can be a great way to explore your creative side. If you've never done it before, try a small role or nonspeaking part, or volunteer at your community theater and ask what you can do to help put on a play. Don't have time for a major production? Borrow a book of plays from the library and get some friends together to take parts and read one aloud.



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**Conceive of a photography project.** Photography used to be an expensive hobby, but now most smartphones come equipped with high-quality cameras. Your photo project can revolve around a theme, such as covered bridges or old barns. The exercise will allow you to practice mindfulness—you'll pay more attention to every bridge and barn you see—and have an artistic product to show off at the end.





**Take in the ballet or visit an art museum.** We get so busy in our daily routines that we often don't notice when a world-class art exhibit arrives at the local museum or a rare dance performance comes to town. Make enjoying arts and cultural venues a way to relax, broaden your horizons, and get out of a rut. Buy some tickets far in advance so you'll have something to look forward to. To increase your artistic awareness, learn more about the performance ahead of time.

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**Have fun cooking.** Join a cooking class or buy a cookbook focused on foods you're not used to preparing and get creative in the kitchen. Or, instead of a book club, start a cooking club with your friends and come up with a rotating menu of dishes from different ethnic cuisines to experiment with at each other's homes. Not only will the club foster fun and social interaction, but it also will allow you to experience something completely new and have something to look forward to.





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