



A Chair That Can Help You Heal?

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Can a piece of furniture have health benefits? If it's a rocking chair, it can! The rocking chair has a place in every home or front porch. And while they're most often associated with babies and senior citizens, their calming, rhythmic motion can benefit everyone. Turns out, that simple act of rocking releases endorphins which can improve mood and reduce stress—something that has caused the medical community to sit up and take notice. Even some airports around the U.S. are adding rocking chairs to ease passenger anxiety. If you've been looking for a simple solution to your complex health issues, rocking in a rocking chair may be the answer you're looking for.



Rocking chairs on a front porch are iconic Americana.

A Brief History of Rocking Chairs

Rocking chairs provide a bit of nostalgia—they're an icon of American culture—and bring us back to a simpler time when relaxing was how we ended the day. Although many folks attribute Benjamin Franklin with inventing the rocking chair, there's no historical record as to who truly did, or when. However, we do know rocking chairs have been around since the early 18th century and made their first appearance in the American colonies. Early designs were often two-seaters but evolved to single-seat chairs over the years, and today they come in many different shapes, colors, and designs that sit in our living rooms, nurseries, and on our front porches.

Rocking chairs come in many shapes, colors, and designs.

5 Ways Rocking Chairs Can Improve Your Health

1. Improved Sleep

Insomniacs, take note! We all know the gentle swaying of a rocker soothes babies and helps them fall asleep, but two studies published in the January 2019 issue of [*Current Biology*](#) show it can help big people fall asleep—and stay asleep—as well. Additionally, researchers found that rocking boosted memory consolidation during sleep.

2. Lessened Alcohol Cravings

Researchers of veteran substance use disorders found that patients who spent time rocking in rocking chairs had fewer urges and desires to drink. Also during the study, clinicians observed that when faced with urges to drink, the participants would rock to self soothe.

3. Mental Health Boost

A [1998 study](#) of nursing home patients found that those suffering from dementia who rocked 1–2 hours per day for 6 weeks were less anxious and also requested fewer pain meds. It seems the act of prolonged rhythmic exercise promotes the release of endorphins, which elevates mood. Psychotherapist Leslie E. Korn, Ph.D., teaches therapeutic rocking to individuals with anxiety, stress, PTSD, autism, and schizophrenia. "Rocking at all stages of life engages the template of touch and the inner infant. We don't grow out of the need for this kind of soothing; we just don't generally receive it or give it as adults."

4. Improved Balance

Falls are the primary cause of emergency room visits in patients over 65 years old. A common risk factor for falling in the elderly is the decrease in sensory perception which results in a decline in balance. Rocking, it seems, can help. The inner ear has something called a vestibular labyrinth which is filled with fluid. When the head moves, the fluid stimulates nerve endings that send impulses to the brain. The rocking encourages the movement of this fluid, thereby increasing the sensation of balance.

Rocking can help with balance.

5. Post-Operative Healing

If you've ever had abdominal surgery, you know that normal protocol is to get you out of bed, sitting in a chair, and walking as soon after surgery as possible. This is to prevent post-operative bowel dysfunction, or POI. However, patients who used rocking chairs during recovery had shortened instances of POI. The exercise performed when rocking stimulates blood flow, which promotes healing. And remember those endorphins? They also act as an analgesic, relieving pain.

A rocker makes a great addition to any home. Whether it's a modern glider, a rocking recliner, or an old-fashioned wooden rocker, it might be the perfect holiday gift for yourself or a loved one. Better yet, get two for your front porch and invite a neighbor to sit a spell.



Carol J. Alexander is a Virginia writer specializing in sustainable/green living, home remodeling, and lifestyle topics. She has written for over 100 national, regional, and local print publications, as well as online. She is the author of *Homestead Cooking with Carol: Bountiful Make-Ahead Meals*, available on Amazon Kindle and in paperback.

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