Research has shown that physical recreation (such as hiking) and social recreation (such as going to the movies with friends) play an important role in improving everyone’s quality of life, whether or not they have been diagnosed with a mental illness. Recreation has even been shown to reduce hospitalizations in individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses.

**Benefits of Leisure and Recreational Activities**

Physical and/or social recreation and leisure can be beneficial in the following ways:

- Improve physical health
- Improve self-esteem
- Improve mood
- Increase energy and activity levels
- Reduce side effects of medication (e.g., weight gain)
- Reduce depression and anxiety
- Provide a distraction from stressful situations

Unfortunately, it can be difficult for individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses to pursue leisure and recreational activities.

**Barriers to Participation in Leisure and Recreational Activities**

Despite the fact that physical and social recreational and leisure activities have many positive effects, people diagnosed with mental illnesses are often significantly less active and may have more difficulties with social inclusion than the general population. This may be because there are many barriers to overcome:

- Negative attitudes and discrimination against individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses may prevent some of them from participating in leisure/recreational activities.

In the article *Just Sit Down So We Can Talk: Perceived Stigma and Community Recreational Pursuits of People with Disabilities*, Leandra Bedini writes, “Attitudes can be one of the most powerful barriers to their pursuit of leisure that individuals [persons with mental illness] can experience.”

- The importance of leisure and recreational activities is often overlooked. Often those who provide mental health services do not recognize how much leisure and recreational activities can improve the overall quality of life, increase pleasure and reduce stress for individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses.