

Stitch by Stitch: Knitting to Find Peace

...and to manage the stress of living in 21st Century America

Isabella Clark

(This text was prepared for EN204: Writing for Online Environments and was originally written in Markdown, a markup language used to construct HTML texts. It was written as a feature article meant for publication in a professional online media outlet, and special care was taken to maximize its readability and functionality as an online text. Please visit *The Navigator* website to view the piece in its original format and access the hyperlinks.)



Image by Rebecca Grant on Unsplash.

When the stress of the world is too much to handle, is there anything to help someone find any sort of solace? Enter the serendipitous, stitch-by-stitch act of knitting. Since the age of 5, I've used knitting as a means to express my own creativity, whether it be through a poorly made scarf or a neon-rainbow hat, and also as a way to ground myself—finding comfort and grounding in the repetitive stitch patterns.

Benefits of Knitting

Many knitters have found this art to be not only a gorgeous expression of a knitter's self, but a form of self-care. As discovered by a number of researchers, and even from the personal experience of these crafters, knitting

has a multitude of benefits that reach far beyond just creating a thoughtful work of art, with knitting even being described as both a ["skilled and creative occupation"](#), demonstrating its incredible range.

Knitting Boosts Mental Health

Therapeutic knitting—yes, it's an actual thing!—has been used to help a wide variety of conditions including: [stress, depression, anxiety, PTSD, addiction, eating disorders, and more](#). Not only is knitting a pleasurable hobby, but it can also aid people who struggle with a large range of mental health issues in dealing with their condition.

Holding the hands together in front of the body creates the sensation of having a protective "bubble" of personal space and comfort and is especially helpful in threatening or anxiety-producing situations.
- Betty Houtman, nurse and lifelong knitter

After you've learned how to knit, the practice can even ["reduce blood levels of cortisol—the stress hormone,"](#) leaving the crafter feeling calmer, more content, and more peaceful overall.

Dr. Paula Redmond, a clinical psychologist and knitter, states that knitting can engage an individual in the theory of "behavioral action" which ["suggests that people experiencing low mood benefit from engaging in activities which allow them to experience pleasure and/or a sense of achievement."](#) Because you can knit either rows at a time or even just one stitch at a time, it can help encourage individuals by reminding them that even small progress is *still* progress.

Knitting Encourages Mindfulness

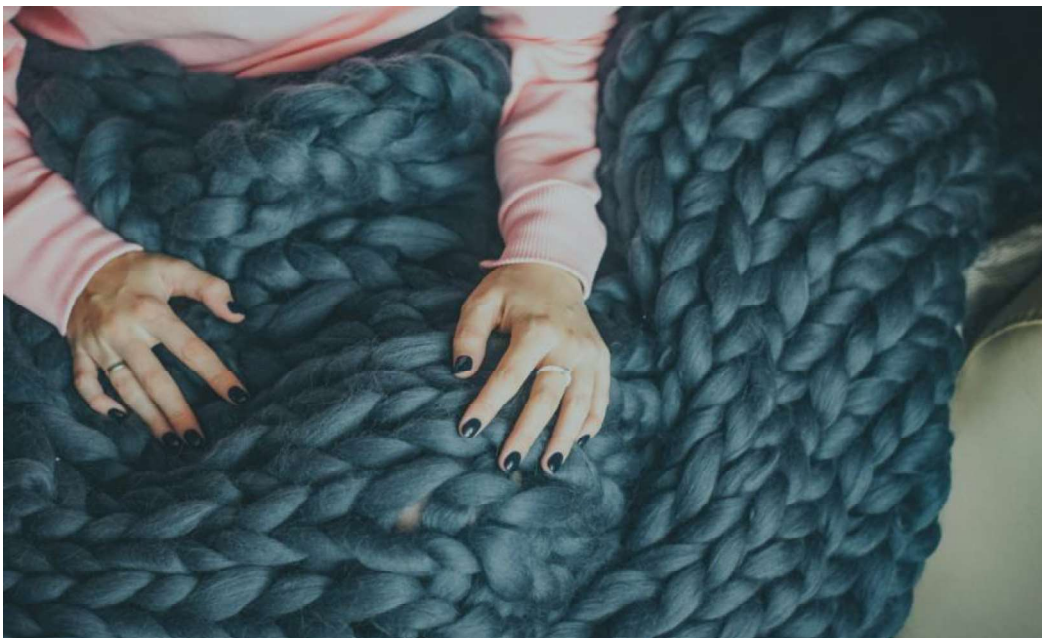


Image by Ekaterina Krusanova on Unsplash.

Knitting can also help individuals practice mindfulness. According to an article featured on UCLA's mindwell page, the repetition of knitting is similar to the patterned breathing in yoga and other meditation exercises. Just the stitch-by-stitch pattern of knitting has been shown to [increase mindfulness while decreasing levels of stress](#).

Mindfulness can ["leave you feeling more in touch with the world,"](#) making the individual that practices this art feel more centered in their life, even boosting their motivation and self-confidence.

As Becky Stewart states, knitting helps her mental health, giving her a mood boost just from the mindfulness it encourages her to partake in.

"Knitting slows me down. It grounds me and allows me to get lost in my thoughts. It make[s] me feel relaxed, in control, and happy."
- Becky Stewart, therapeutic knitting teacher and creator of KnitOm.

Knitting Connects People

Knitting is often seen as a sociable activity, providing an activity for the hands while conversing with others. In this way, knitting can also help connect others in the form of local knitting groups and classes. Knitting can be a great way to connect with others that have similar interests, and maybe even something to teach you, especially since knitting is so versatile and takes such a wide variety of forms.

Houtman points out that knitting groups can also be [low-pressure social environments](#) for those with anxiety because eye contact is not necessary to keep in the conversation. Also, being able to "choos[e] whether or not to participate means that you are in control".

[Research](#) has found that knitting has a range of benefits, including social ones, which can improve the quality of life for individuals that knit.

Knitting Helps Manage Chronic Pain

Knitting has also been linked to [helping individuals cope with chronic pain](#). Knitting can help slow and ground individuals, calming their minds and bodies while they engage in the repetitive pattern of stitching. Research even suggests that knitting [aids in the release of serotonin](#), which can help boost someone's mood and aid in increasing the body's pain threshold.

"[Depression and chronic pain] make it difficult to concentrate the mind. Knitting is exciting because it opens up the benefits of Mindfulness to everyone."
- Betsan Corkhill, teacher of therapeutic knitting and mindfulness meditation.

It's astounding that something as small as moving yarn from needle to needle can aid someone in coping with chronic pain, but it has been proved time and time again as a small way to encourage individuals in their healing and coping processes.



Image by Ungureanu Ionut on Unsplash.

Knitting Aids with Aging

Knitting can even help buffer the effects and onset of dementia and Alzheimer's. A study done by the Mayo Clinic found that crafting activities [reduced mild cognitive impairment by 28 percent](#), with mild cognitive impairment defined as "intermediate stage between normal cognitive aging and dementia."

Harvard Medical School's Mind and Body Institute found that knitting can also reduce an individual's heart rate to 11 bpm less than it would be without the activity, meaning that [knitting could result in lower blood pressure](#).

Rachel Moss, writing for HuffPost, states that [knitting isn't something that goes away with aging](#), but that it is a skill that can still be used even as an individual loses sight and strength. It's also a skill that can help aging individuals stay connected, as the community of the craft is a very sociable one.

How can you start?

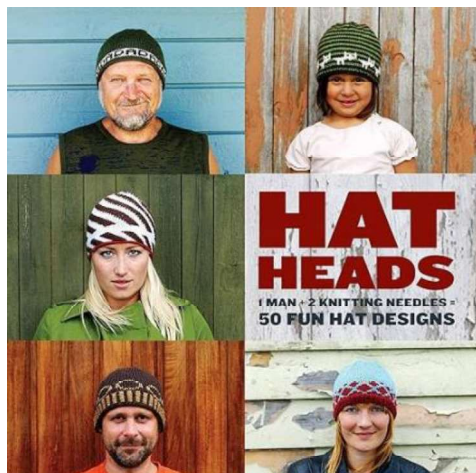
Now that you know some of the wide range of benefits knitting has to offer—where can you go next? While my mom helped me greatly in my journey to becoming an intermediate knitter, I am still continuing to learn more knitting skills— there is always more to find!

There are a variety of resources that will turn up from just a simple online search including books, YouTube videos, and even some free online classes. It can be pretty overwhelming. To help you start your journey, I'll start you off with some of my favorite books, YouTube channels, and blogs!

Books

From "Knitting for Dummies" to a book dedicated to knitting cute monsters, I've read and followed patterns from a variety of authors and knitters. Here are a couple of the most useful books I've come across!

Hat Heads by Trond Anfinnsen



I actually used this book to knit my first hat (see picture below)! Not only are there 50 customizable hat designs, but Anfinnsen also includes parts of his story and stories from the people he knit these 50 hats for. While there are patterns that incorporate fair isle knitting techniques for advanced knitters, there are also simple, beginner-friendly designs included, relying on stitch patterns (instead of colors) to help make an eye-catching design.

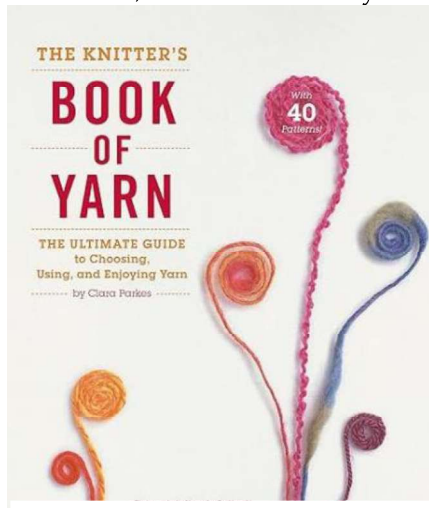
You can buy a paperback of this book on [Amazon](#) for \$13.99.

This book is definitely 13-year-old Bella approved— hopefully it can help

you in your hat-making pursuits as much as it helped me!

The Knitter's Book of Yarn by Clara Parkes

This book, recommended by Norman of Nimble Needles, gives the reader a



detailed explanation of different yarns and even patterns that go along with each type, highlighting strengths of each weight, type, and feel of each one. As a beginning knitter, I had trouble knowing which yarn to get for each type of project and look I was going for— this is a great resource to have for all yarn-crafters!

You can buy a hardcover of this book on [Amazon](#) for \$18.15.

While this may seem intimidating at first, learning the types of yarn can be beneficial for knitters of all skill-levels, so it's definitely worth keeping on your list of to-reads.

Blogs

If you don't care to make a trip to your local bookstore or library— don't worry! There are plenty of knitting blogs out there. From free knitting lessons to free, beginner-friendly patterns, there are plenty of great resources to start up your knitting journey in the blogs below!

Nimble Needles

Norman, the creator of Nimble Needles (pictured above), incorporates [free knitting lessons](#) on his website going by the same name of his Instagram



Image from the Nimble Needles Instagram page.

account, Nimble Needles. Through clear photos, detailed text instructions, and even slow-motion videos, Norman offers a variety of instructional materials to help even the most novice knitter learn this yarn craft.

Nimble Needles also boasts a range of [free knitting patterns](#) from patterns for scarves, hats, and mittens, to bigger, more complicated projects, such as sweaters and socks! I was surprised at the number of resources on his blog the first time I came across it— you can explore Nimble Needles [here](#)!

Mama in a Stitch

Mama in a Stitch's blog, created and run by Jessica, also boasts a variety of



Image from the Mama in a Stitch Instagram page.

[free knitting patterns](#). Compared to Nimble Needles, these patterns are elegantly simple, but executed in a unique way. Not only does she provide free knitting patterns, but she also posts [free crochet patterns](#).

This blog includes patterns for a range of blankets, tote bags, vests, cardigans, and more! I also enjoy that Jessica includes a link to her most recent video in her blog posts, offering a visual explanation to some of her most popular patterns. It's easy to get lost in her earthy colorings, classy designs and clear explanations of how a pattern works— check out Mama in a Stitch's blog, patterns, and more [here](#)

YouTube Channels

If you're a visual learner, these YouTube channels are for you! From examples of the most basic knitting stitches to videos in which creators walk you through a full pattern, these YouTube channels each have a great and unique variety of content.

Sheep & Stitch

[Sheep & Stitch](#)'s YouTube channel not only has knitting patterns, but also includes knitting tips, like how to make seamless joins when knitting in the



Image from the Sheep and Stitch Instagram page.

round, and a collection of knitting stitches that are beginner friendly.

This channel is a great resource for all crafters, regardless of if you're a beginner, novice, or advanced knitter, because there are tutorials for advanced stitches and techniques, yet also videos addressing common questions beginning knitters may have, such as [how to fix extra stitches](#) and [how to loosen up tight knitting](#). Even if you're an advanced knitter, I can confidently say that

Sheep & Stitch will have a new technique, stitch pattern, or inventive pattern that will snag your interest.



Image from Elise Rose Crochet's Instagram page.

Elise Rose Crochet

While Elise's YouTube channel is named "Elise Rose Crochet," she also posts great informational [knitting videos](#)! From videos explaining [creative ways to use yarn scraps](#) and [facts about Victorian-era knitting](#), even to [why she knits as a form of self care](#), there is a variety of great crafting content on her channel.

Elise also specializes in [amigurumi](#), which are crocheted or knit animals, so

her YouTube boasts an assortment of both knit and crochet amigurumi patterns. As a beginner, she even has a video dedicated to easy, [beginner-friendly, knit toys](#). You can look more into Elise's amigurumi and general yarn crafting advice [here](#)!

Go Knit!

Picking up knitting means that little by little, you can find inspiration from the smallest places and create peace for yourself in an engaging and meditative way. Because it's such a versatile art, especially with the range of projects one can make—from a rectangular scarf to practice a stitch pattern to the journey of knitting a full sweater—there is something for anyone that is determined to try.

No matter when you begin, who you are, or why you want to learn, there is always a benefit to be gained from the traditional, versatile, and beautiful art of knitting. As I create more projects, learn new stitches, and meet new people, I realize that the journey of knitting will never truly be over and will always offer me (and you!) something more to explore.