

Information handout

US English

Exercise For Mental Health



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Description

Exercise is an evidence-based treatment for depression and anxiety. There is evidence to suggest that in the treatment of depression, exercise interventions lead to a treatment effect with a magnitude of effect similar to other established forms of treatment such as CBT and medication (Johnsen & Fribog, 2015; Kirsch et al, 2008; Kvam et al, 2016). Psychologists believe that exercise is helpful for a number of reasons:

- It can help you to switch your attention away from unwanted or unhelpful thoughts or worries.
- It can lead to an increase in your body's natural 'feel good' chemicals, including endorphins and endocannabinoids.
- It can help you to sleep better which is an important effect given the important role of poor sleep in the maintenance of mental health problems.
- It can lead to increases in self-esteem and resilience.
- Regular exercise can increase your energy levels which can have knock-on effects upon how you engage in valued activities.

Exercise For Mental Health is an information handout presenting information about exercise and mental health, reasons why exercise has beneficial effects upon mental health, and advice about how to get started. It is designed as a guide for clients who are considering exercising and there is evidence from multiple research studies that “exercise prescription or motivational messages in printed form or by computer are more effective than face-to-face counselling alone” (Richardson et al, 2005).

Instructions

This is a Psychology Tools information handout. Suggested uses include:

- Client handout – use as a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – use to provoke a discussion and explore client beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Teaching resource – use as a learning tool during training.

References

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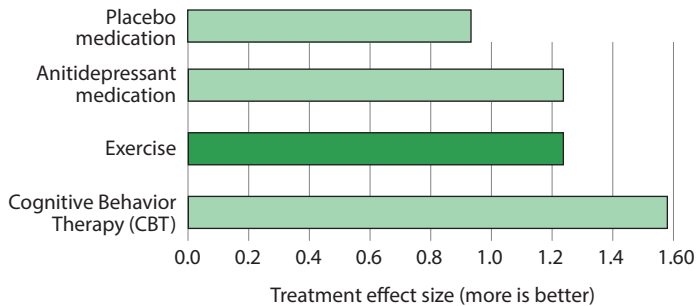
Exercise For Mental Health

Exercise can be a powerful tool for managing your mood. It can help you to cope with mental health struggles. Understanding how it can help and how to get started may give you the motivational drive to get moving.

Exercise has a profound impact on cognitive abilities and mental health. It is simply one of the best treatments we have for most psychiatric problems.

– John Ratey, M.D.

What does the research say?



Exercise, CBT, and medication are evidence-based treatments for anxiety and depression with comparably similar effects.

Unlike CBT and medication, exercise can be done without medical supervision and has a cascade of other physical health benefits.

What does exercise do for your mental health?



Gets you out of your mind and into your body. Exercise can help to shift your awareness away from unwanted thoughts or worries. This can help you to feel better by not dwelling so much on your negative thought patterns.



Increases your body's natural feel good chemicals. Hormones such as endorphins and neurotransmitters such as endocannabinoids are released during exercise which will improve your mood.



Helps you sleep better. Exercise, particularly in the morning or afternoon, can help improve your sleep. Poor sleep is a common factor in many mental health conditions and improving your sleep can greatly improve the way you feel.



Leads to greater self-esteem. With a sense of achievement comes greater self-confidence and self-esteem. Exercise can also increase your sense of self-control, your ability to withstand challenges, and your body-confidence.



Gives you more energy. Regular exercise will increase your energy levels and therefore you will be able to enjoy more of the things you love doing. The more you do the greater your energy capacity.

How can I get started?

Pick an exercise you would like to try and then pick a time in your day where you can do it, and stick to it. Identify potential barriers to exercising and strategize ways to overcome them.

What type of exercise is best? Whatever you enjoy doing! Research suggests that moderate intensity exercise is best, and all types of exercise are effective.

How much exercise do I need to do? Evidence from research seems to show that: some exercise is much better than none, and 3-4 times per week is likely optimal.

Exercises you might like to try:

- Going for a run or walk around your local park, swimming, cycling, yoga, martial arts, boxing, weightlifting, dancing, gymnastics, pilates, football, rugby, hockey.
- Exercise does not need to be structured or formal, you could try walking instead of driving for short journeys, taking the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator, gardening, or even cleaning the house.

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