Exercise for Depression:
Learn About the Benefits

VA

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration

PBM Academic Detailing Service

Exercise for Depression

Exercise increases your body's feel-good chemicals, called endorphins.

Endorphins:

- Reduce your perception of pain
- Trigger a positive feeling in the body
- Act as a sedative to help you sleep

Workouts that increase your heartbeat will improve circulation in the brain. This results in healthy brain function and more balanced brain chemistry.

Benefits of Exercise

- Improves mood and self-esteem
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Increases energy
- Improves sleep
- Lowers blood pressure
- Improves heart health
- Builds stronger muscles and bones
- Reduces body fat and maintains a healthy weight

Are You Finding it Hard to Get Started?

It can be difficult to find the motivation to exercise if you are depressed due to:

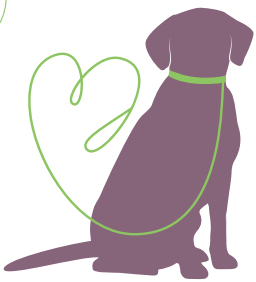
- Poor sleep
- Less energy
- Appetite changes
- Body aches
- Increased pain perception

How Can You Break the Cycle?

Get up and move even if it's just a little bit. Start with five minutes a day and add five minutes each week.

Try this:

- Exercise with a friend
- Go for a walk in the park
- Walk your dog
- Go fishing
- Mow the lawn
- Join a group class like yoga or water aerobics



Types of Exercise for Depression

Consider the following when choosing what type of exercise is best for you:

- What physical activities do I like?
- Do I like group or individual activities?
- What best fits my schedule?
- Do I have physical conditions that limit my choice of exercise?

For more information about physical activity visit VA's **Be Physically Active** page.

"Start with low-impact activities like biking, dancing, swimming, tai chi or walking. Even doing some gardening or housework counts as activity!"

Before You Start

Before starting any activity, talk to your healthcare team if you have chronic conditions. Some examples of chronic conditions include diabetes, heart disease, or arthritis. Avoid activity if you have active symptoms, such as chest pain or pressure, dizziness, or joint pain.

If you have concerns about increasing your physical activity, talk with your healthcare team. They can help you find the type of exercise that will work best for you.

Exercise should not be painful. Proper posture and technique will help you stay safe and enjoy being active.

Exercise can be a helpful treatment for depression. If your provider thinks you need medicines or talk therapy, it is important to continue these. Exercise can maximize your benefits when combined with medicines or talk therapy. In some cases, exercise can be used as the only treatment.

How Much Exercise is Enough?

- Any amount of exercise can help you treat depression!
- Studies looking at improving mood in depression found a strong link between depression and exercise. These studies found that depression can improve when you exercise at least 30 minutes for 3 days a week. The activity you select must increase your heartbeat to be effective.
- The type of exercise does not matter.

Stay Motivated

- Schedule time for exercise.
- Exercise on a budget. You do not need to buy equipment or gym memberships. You can be creative and use household items and daily activities.
- Make exercise fun! Choose an activity you *Enjoy!*

Contact info:

Veteran's Crisis Line
1-800-273-TALK (8255) or
Text - 838255

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