



Keeping active is a good way to help prevent or manage mild to moderate depression and anxiety. Getting started or motivated to exercise and staying active can be difficult for people with depression.

HOW DOES EXERCISE HELP WITH DEPRESSION?

There are many views as to how exercise helps people with depression. Exercise may block negative thoughts or distract people from daily worries. If a person exercises with others, exercise may increase social contact.

Compared to people without depression, depressed people generally have lower fitness levels. Increased fitness may lift mood.

Exercise may increase levels of neurotransmitters (chemical messengers in the brain) that have been found to be in short supply in depressed people. Exercise may increase the level of these chemicals as well as the level of endorphins, which are chemicals in the brain that have 'mood-lifting' qualities.¹

IS IT EFFECTIVE IN HELPING DEPRESSION?

A number of studies have found that exercise helps depression. Jogging, weightlifting, walking, stationary cycling and resistance training (pushing or pulling weights with arms and legs) have all been found to be helpful in preventing or treating mild to moderate depression. In older people, exercise has been found to be as helpful as antidepressant medication or social contact in treating depression.¹

The benefits that can be attained from exercise depend on the amount of exercise that is undertaken. A recent study² has reported that total energy expenditure is a key factor in the remission of depression, leading the authors to recommend that individuals should be encouraged to achieve at least the minimum recommended levels of energy expenditure of 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity on most and preferably all, days of the week.³

WHY IS KEEPING ACTIVE IMPORTANT?

Keeping active can help a person stay *physically* fit and *mentally* healthy. Research shows that keeping active can:

- help lift mood
- help people get a good night's sleep
- increase energy levels
- help block negative thoughts and/or distract people from daily worries
- help people feel less alone if they exercise or socialise with others
- increase well-being.

KEEPING ACTIVE

People with severe depression may find it hard to do simple things such as getting up and dressed in the morning. They may also find it difficult to become motivated or stick to a plan.

Tips to get started

Start simple

It's important to increase activity levels gradually. Start by planning simple daily activities such as shopping, driving, gardening, writing letters or completing simple household tasks. Completing these activities can increase a person's self-confidence and build the motivation needed to take on more energetic activities.

Do what is enjoyable

People with depression often lose interest and pleasure in doing things they once enjoyed. This loss of pleasure and enjoyment in life can make symptoms worse. To reverse this negative cycle, plan activities that are enjoyable, interesting, relaxing or satisfying. These activities are important in overcoming depression. At first, they may not feel as enjoyable as before, but with persistence, the pleasure should eventually return.

1 Jorm AF, Christensen H, Griffiths KM, Korten AE, Rodgers B. *Help for depression: What works (and what doesn't)*. Centre for Mental Health Research: Canberra, 2001.

2 Dunn AL, Trivedi MH, Kampert JB, et al. Exercise treatment for depression: efficacy and dose response. *AM J Prev Med*. Jan 2005; 28(1):1-8.

3 Pate RR, Pratt M, Blair SN, et al. Physical activity and public health. A recommendation from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the American College of Sports Medicine. *Jama*. Feb 1 1995; 273(5):402-407.

Keeping active

FACT SHEET 8

Include other people

People with depression often don't feel like socialising with others. However, spending time alone can make a person feel cut off from the world, making it harder to recover. That's why it's important to participate in activities with family members and close friends – and to accept social invitations, even though it's the last thing the person may want to do. Keeping connected with people helps increase levels of well-being, confidence and opportunities to participate in physical activities.

Make a plan

Planning a routine can help people to become more active. Make sure some form of exercise is scheduled each day. Try to stick to the plan as closely as possible, but be flexible. If an activity runs overtime or cannot be completed, shorten or skip it and move onto the next one at the appointed time.

Ideas for activities to include in a personal schedule:

Keep fit

- Go for a 20 minute walk
- Ride a bike
- Do some gardening
- Go bushwalking
- Go to the gym
- Go swimming

Entertain yourself

- Read a newspaper/book/magazine
- Write a letter/email
- Surf the internet
- Play a solo card game
- Do a crossword or sudoku

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			



Socialise

- Invite a friend around for coffee
- Organise a video evening
- Visit a neighbour
- Phone a friend for a chat
- Take children and/or pets to the playground or park

Pamper yourself

- Have a bubble bath
- Buy some flowers
- Lie on the beach and read a book

Around the house

- Cook something new
- Listen to music/radio
- Do some gardening
- Play in the backyard with children or pets

Away from home

- Visit a friend or family member
- Join a club
- Go to a market
- Visit a museum
- Visit an art gallery
- Visit the library
- Go to a movie.

Opposite is a blank table for you to practise scheduling your activities.

WHO CAN HELP WITH ACTIVITY PLANS?

While there are many things that can be done to help people become active, some people may need help to get moving and stay on track. There are many organisations and people in the community who can help.

General Practitioner

A doctor who is a General Practitioner (GP) will be able to provide advice and information about depression and exercise. He/she will also be able give referrals to a qualified exercise physiologist, covered under Medicare.

Exercise Physiologists

Exercise physiologists are health professionals who have graduated from a certified university course in exercise science and provide services relating to health, fitness and exercise. People who have ongoing health conditions are now able to access services from exercise physiologists at subsidised rates through Medicare. For more information visit www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

Council Recreation Centres

Many councils offer free or cheap sport and recreation facilities such as swimming pools, walking circuits, tennis courts and skating ramps. Check with the local council to see what's available in the area.

Gymnasiums/Sports Clubs

Like recreation centres, gyms don't all have the same facilities, but most offer a range of classes including aerobics and Pilates, have equipment such as rowing and walking machines and many have swimming pools. Gyms often have instructors who can develop personal fitness plans and help with the motivation needed to stick with it!

Community Centres/Neighbourhood Houses

Community centres or neighbourhood houses host a variety of groups which focus on staying active and have affordable membership fees. These may include aerobics, yoga, tai chi, dancing and walking groups. For information on how to find community centres or neighbourhood houses, contact the local council or mental health information or awareness agency.



FACT SHEET 8

MORE INFORMATION

beyondblue: the national depression initiative

www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and related alcohol and drug problems, available treatments and where to get help

beyondblue info line 1300 22 4636

Information on depression, anxiety and related drug and alcohol problems, available treatments and referral only (local call)

www.youthbeyondblue.com

beyondblue's website for young people – information on depression and how to help a friend

Go For Your Life

www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au

Information on how to become active and stay healthy

Australian Association of Exercise Sports Science

www.aaess.com.au

Information on exercise physiologist services and how to find an exercise physiologist

SANE Australia

1800 187 263 or www.sane.org

Information and referral on a range of mental health issues, including living healthily

Kinect Australia

www.vicfit.com.au

Information on fitness

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Depression and anxiety are manageable. With the right treatment most people recover from depression and/or anxiety.
- Keeping active can help manage or prevent mild to moderate depression and anxiety.
- There are many things a person can do to keep active, at little or no cost.
- Help and information is available for people with depression who want to keep active.
- Up to five visits to an exercise physiologist are now covered under Medicare if the person has a referral from a GP.

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