

Exercise is an important part of a healthy lifestyle that can bring great benefits for both physical and mental health. When it comes to making lifestyle changes to positively affect your treatment, increasing your level of physical activity is one of the most simple and effective steps you can take. Consider speaking with your clinician about ways you can improve your mental health through regular exercise.

Can exercise really help?

Physical activity has been shown to help counteract depression by:

- Reducing the severity of depressive symptoms.
- Leading to improved self-esteem.
- Relieving stress by burning off stress chemicals such as adrenaline.
- Providing distraction from negative thinking.
- Improving the quality of sleep.
- Stimulating the body's release of endorphins, which are chemicals that have a naturally relaxing and calming effect on the body.



Getting motivated

For many people experiencing the symptoms of depression, it can be tough to find the motivation to get up and go. If you find you need an additional “push” to get serious about exercise, keep in mind there are both immediate and long-term benefits:

- **Immediate:** regulating mood and lessening depressive symptoms.
- **Long-term:** greater strength, more energy, weight loss, and muscle toning.

Research has shown that aerobic (or heart-rate elevating) activities can produce the most dramatic reductions in depressive symptoms. Other forms of exercise, such as strength training or conditioning, may also be effective. You can choose from a wide variety of activities!

Steps for getting started

- 1) Check with your doctor or health care provider before you begin any exercise program.
- 2) Choose an activity that you like to do. The key is simply to get moving.
- 3) Decide how much activity is right for you.
 - The American Heart Association recommends that adults devote 30 minutes a day, five days each week to physical activity to help maintain overall health. That's a good starting point.
- 4) Set and maintain a regular routine.
 - When you make exercise a priority on your daily calendar, you'll be less likely to forget or neglect it.
- 5) Start slowly and increase your activity level over time.
- 6) Keep a record of your activity levels.
 - Tracking your activity can help establish a commitment to an exercise routine.
 - Over time, this record can be an important tool to track the role that exercise is playing in elevating your mood and lessening your symptoms.

Don't get discouraged. There will be times when, for one reason or another, you fall short of your exercise goals. Keep going, and remember that *every* effort is worthwhile.



U-M Depression Center 800-475-6424 www.depressioncenter.org

Please visit the UMDC online toolkit at www.depressiontoolkit.org. This toolkit was made possible by the Friends of the University of Michigan Hospital and Health System.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

©2011 The Regents of the University of Michigan