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WHO KNEW EXERCISE COULD BE THIS GOOD FOR YOUR MENTAL WELLNESS?

This month we explore exercise and mental health. We've previously talked about this; however, there's some great new research out, and with better weather ahead we thought this might be great timing to 'jump' in and provide more helpful information to hopefully get you moving for good physical AND mental health.

Click [here](#) to read last month's newsletter, all about the 'Imposter Syndrome', and to access all our previous articles.

Exercise Your Way To Mental Wellness

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We all know that physical exercise is good for us physically – it reduces the risk of serious diseases; builds strong muscles and bones; and improves blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels. However, physical exercise is also great for our mental health – and research is beginning to show just how good it can be for mental wellness. Read on to find out more.

If you're interested in our previous articles, please click [here](#)

If you've got a suggestion for an article, or there's something more you would like to hear about, please send us an email - click [here](#)

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What is Physical Activity and Exercise?

Physical Activity = any movement produced by your muscles

Exercise = a structured form of physical activity with the aim of improving health

How Much Exercise Should I Be Getting?

The recommended target is 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week. *That's just over 20 minutes per day.* However, research shows the average person will get less than this, and if you've got mental health challenges you're more likely to exercise less than the average person.

What Does Exercise Do For The Mind And Body?

There are so many benefits. Exercise:

- increases our energy levels – and reduces our feelings of low energy or fatigue
- leads to better sleep – exercising 4 to 8 hours before bedtime is optimal for improving sleep quality (although some exercise at any time of the day seems to be beneficial)
- improves self-esteem – we feel better about our physical self-worth, we can improve our body image, and have a higher level of self-esteem
- lowers your risk of death – physical inactivity is estimated to cause 9% of all premature deaths
- lowers your risk of ill health – there is a strong association between regular exercise and decreased risk of diabetes, stroke, and cancer
- improved brain function – our cognitive performance increases, our concentration increases, our irritability decreases, and it may slow the deterioration of Alzheimer's disease

How Can Exercise Help With Mental Health Conditions?

Exercise and Depression : Research consistently finds exercise to be an effective treatment for depression, with the effects similar to or better than other forms of

treatment, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and medication. Further, studies have found that 30 minutes of exercise a day three to five times a week, is equivalent to taking anti-depressants (without the side effects), and any amount of activity, as little as 10 to 15 minutes at a time, can also improve mood. Greater benefits are achieved if you are supervised by a qualified exercise professional, and if you exercise moderate to vigorously vs light to moderately. Further, aerobic, non-aerobic, and resistance training have all been found to be helpful. *Conclusion : some exercise is much better than none, more seems better, and all types of exercise are effective.*

Exercise and Anxiety : Physical activity has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety – short and long-term. After 30 minutes of aerobic exercise you experience reductions in anxiety sensitivity, intolerance of uncertainty, and increases in distress tolerance. Further, those who take part in regular physical activity have a reduced likelihood of developing an anxiety disorder. If you have PTSD, combining your usual treatment with exercise will improve your symptoms. If you have Panic Disorder, aerobic exercise reduces anxiety when paired with therapy. If you have another anxiety disorder (Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder) similar results have also been observed when adding walking into your day. *Conclusion : exercise is helpful for anxiety disorders, with current research suggesting more intense exercise is more effective (in most cases), especially when paired with therapy.*

Exercise and Psychosis : Research supports the use of exercise in conjunction with standard treatments to improve negative symptoms (anhedonia, emotional flattening, and behavioural withdrawal) in individuals with schizophrenia. *Conclusion : aerobic, strength exercises, and yoga reduce psychiatric symptoms and improve health-related quality of life.*

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Exercise and Addiction : Many studies provide evidence that acute exercise reduces cravings, improves withdrawal symptoms, and decreases triggers. However, exercise does not appear to reduce alcohol consumption, but it does improve depression in these individuals. *Conclusion : exercise can be helpful for some addictions.*

How Does Physical Exercise Improve Mental Wellness?

Biological Mechanisms

- exercise increases a protein that is an important component in the extinction of fear. Greater levels of this protein are found in those who aerobically exercise vs those who participate in resistance exercises
- exercise decreases the fight-flight-freeze network, with individuals being less reactive to stress and more resilient to daily stressors
- exercise can reduce inflammation in the body (inflammation has been linked to depression)
- chemicals within the body are released with aerobic exercise, which lead to a natural 'high'

Psychological Mechanisms

- exercise promotes a sense of mastery and achievement, the opposite to what people with depression feel
- exercise assists the expenditure of anxious energy which can build up when your 'fight-flight' system is constantly triggered
- exercise promotes improved self-esteem through an improved body image, body satisfaction or acceptance, and promotes a sense of autonomy and control

Social Mechanisms

- exercise promotes opportunities to mix with other people
- exercise promotes a sense of belonging and significance

- exercise increases social skills, social interest, and social communication

What Are The Further Benefits Of Engaging In Exercise For Mental Wellness?

- exercise can be low-cost
- exercise leads to physical benefits
- exercise can be done independently or with others
- exercise is generally non-stigmatising, with most people being proud to say that they exercise
- exercise has social benefits

Ways Of Integrating Exercise Into Your Day

- be informed – know and understand the physical and mental health benefits of exercise (such as detailed in this article)
- remember that exercise adds to your energy, whereas most people believe exercise is an energy depleter (think of exercise as an elastic band in a toy – exercise 'winds up' the elastic band storing more energy in it)
- know that short-term you may experience some discomfort, but it will pass
- think about your goals and values – physical and mental
- monitor your progress – review your goals weekly, and problem solve anything that's not working the way you want it to
- use technology – smart watches and smart phone apps can be a great way to monitor your progress
- engage others – to exercise with you, or to be your cheerleaders
- identify your barriers that might sabotage your goals – and plan for them

The Take Away

Exercise is great for you physically and mentally, and in whatever form you can get it. Start to make exercise a part of your day, and reap the benefits.

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Talks

The Brain Changing Benefits of Exercise by Wendy Suzuki

https://www.ted.com/talks/wendy_suzuki_the_brain_changing_benefits_of_exercise

What's the most transformative thing that you can do for your brain today? Exercise! says neuroscientist Wendy Suzuki. Get inspired to exercise as Suzuki discusses the science of how working out boosts your mood and memory - and protects your brain against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's.

Exercise and Mental Health by Dr Sam Harvey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ivfcDUu8o>

We all know there's no silver bullet when it comes to managing and treating illnesses like depression, bipolar and anxiety. However, the research on the benefits of exercise for your mental health, are compelling. Dr Sam Harvey talks here about the research.

Websites



Health Direct : Exercise and Mental Health

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/exercise-and-mental-health>



Beyond Blue : Exercise Your Way To Good Mental Health

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/supporting-yourself/exercise-your-way-to-good-mental-health>

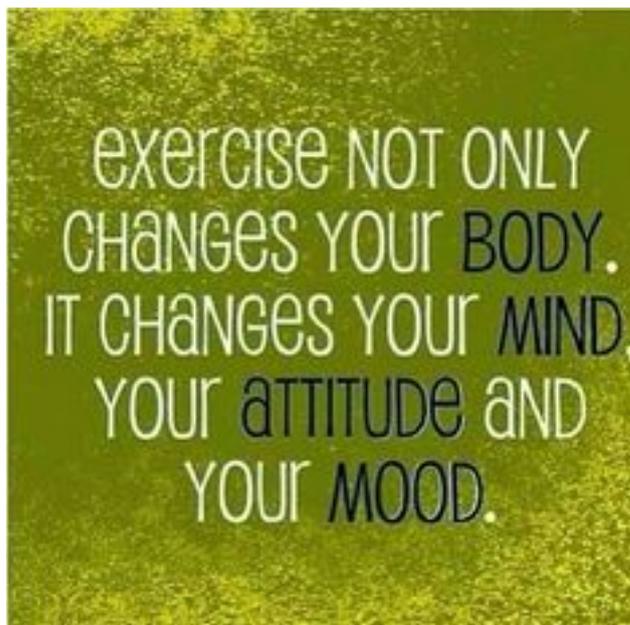


**Black Dog
Institute**

Black Dog Institute : Exercise Your Mood

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/get-involved/exercise-your-mood>

As always, if you would like some help, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, admin@awakenpsychology.com.au or [click here](#)



If at any stage, you find you need urgent assistance – go to your closest **Emergency Department**, call the **Mental Health Emergency Line** on 13 14 65, or call **Lifeline** on 13 11 14.

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