

Depression and exercise

What is depression?

Depression is a common, potentially debilitating condition. People with depression experience sadness, loss of interest or pleasure and feelings of guilt or low self worth. Depression may also manifest as disturbances in sleep, concentration, appetite, or as persistent fatigue (1). More than 350 million people worldwide are affected by depression and the condition ranks as a leading cause of disability.

Why is physical activity or exercise important in the management of depression?

Regular physical activity or exercise may be as beneficial as medications or psychological therapies and offers a number of benefits including...

- A lower risk of depression, now and in the future (2);
- Effective strategy to manage weight gain, diabetes risk and cardiovascular disease risk associated with depression (3)
- Effective in reducing symptoms of depression for people experiencing other mental disorders (4).

What type of exercise might be beneficial for people with depression?

A recent systematic review (5) concluded that supervised aerobic exercise which is similar to that recommended for the general population is likely to be beneficial for people with depression. This is summarised below.

Frequency	Intensity	Time	Type	Supervision	Setting
3-4 times weekly	Low – moderate or patient-preferred	30-40 minutes	Any aerobic activity	Appropriately trained and qualified personnel	Group or individual

Ideally, exercise participation should be ongoing; however, a minimum program length of 9 weeks is suggested.

How do I commence an exercise program?

Talk to your treating specialist about an exercise program that suits your personal preferences and circumstances. They may refer you to an Accredited Exercise Physiologist, who has specialised training in the design and delivery of exercise and lifestyle interventions for people with chronic and complex conditions including depression.

References and further information

Exercise is Medicine Australia www.exerciseismedicine.org.au

Find an Accredited Exercise Physiologist www.essa.org.au

Exercise Right www.exerciseright.com.au

1. WHO. (2014). Depression: definition Retrieved 7 May, 2014, from <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/pages/news/news/2012/10/depression-in-europe/depression-definition>
2. Mammen, G., & Faulkner, G. (2013). Physical Activity and the Prevention of Depression: A Systematic Review of Prospective Studies. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 45(5), 649-657
3. Berk, M., Sarris, J., Coulson, C. E., & Jacka, F. N. (2013). Lifestyle Management of Unipolar Depression. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 127(Suppl. 443), 38-54
4. Rosenbaum, S., Tiedemann, A., Sherrington, C., Curtis, J., & Ward, P. B. (2014). Physical Activity Interventions for People With Mental Illness: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, DOI: 10.4088/JCP.13r08765
5. Stanton, R., & Reaburn, P. (2013). Exercise and the Treatment of Depression: A review of the Exercise Program Variables. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 17(2), 117-182

For more detailed information, please read the full version of this factsheet at www.exerciseismedicine.org.au

