

INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT

# DEPRESSION

## Exercise to treat depression

### Key Points:

- Regular exercise is one of the most important things you can do for your health.
- A few studies show that exercise is an effective treatment for some persons with mild to moderate depression.
- More studies show that therapy or medication is an effective treatment.
- Any exercise is better than none, but 30 minutes of vigorous exercise each day works the best. You can do this all at once or break it up into shorter 10 or 15 minute sessions.
- It's important to choose an activity you enjoy so you stick with it.
- People are more likely to keep exercising if they join a regular exercise class or work with a trainer.
- If your depression does not improve, see your doctor or another professional. They might recommend adding medication or therapy.

### Exercise to treat depression

- Research shows that exercise is related to a more positive mood.
- Some studies show that an exercise program increases the effect of other treatments for depression.
- One study found that exercise was as effective as medication. People in this study were 40 years of age and did not exercise regularly before they started. In this program they exercised 3 times a week over 16 weeks with help from a trainer.
- People who kept up the exercise over the following year were more likely to continue to feel well.
- This is more likely to help if you do not exercise already and if you focus on regular cardio exercise in your program.



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## How does exercise help depression?

More research is needed to show how exercise may help with depression. Exercise may:

- Help you feel more confident.
- Take your mind off of worries and negative thoughts.
- Increase social contacts and reduce feelings of loneliness.
- Increase energy level.
- Improve sleep.
- Increase levels of chemicals in your brain that help you feel good.

## What kind of exercise is best?

- Exercise is more than running laps or lifting weights. It includes daily activities like walking the dog, gardening, walking to work or washing the car.
- Any regular activity that gets you moving and increases your heart rate and breathing can be helpful.
- You can start by adding physical activities to your day - go for a walk, rake the leaves, vacuum the house, go for a bike ride.
- Check out these links for activity guidelines and tips:
  - <http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>
  - <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/index-eng.php>

## Where to get more information

The following book may be helpful:

Exercise for Mood and Anxiety: Proven Strategies for Overcoming Depression and Enhancing Well-Being. By Michael Otto and Jasper Smits. (2011). New York: Oxford University Press.

Tip sheets on how to increase your physical activity:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/index-eng.php>

Find an organized physical activity program, sport or recreation organization in your area:

<http://www.participation.com/>

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines:

<http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>

**Disclaimer:** Information in this pamphlet is provided for educational purposes only. Always consult a qualified health care professional for your specific care.



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For more fact sheets and information about depression and its treatment please visit: <http://depression.informedchoices.ca>

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**Source:** This summary provides scientifically accurate information. It was prepared in a research review by researchers and young adults with the Mobilizing Minds Research Group. The researchers are based at six universities: Manitoba, York, McMaster, Brock, Brandon, and Université Laval. Our core community partner is [mindyourmind.ca](http://mindyourmind.ca) located in London, Ontario. Our young adult team members are located all across the country. Last revised: 12 March 2013.

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## References:

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Hoffman, B. M., Babyak, M. A., Craighead, W. E., Sherwood, A., Doraiswamy, P. M., Coons, M. J., & Blumenthal, J. A. (2011). Exercise and pharmacotherapy in patients with major depression: One-year follow-up of the SMILE study. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 73(2), 127-133. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0b013e31820433a5>