

LIFESTYLE-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR DEPRESSION

Exercise and physical activity



Research says that engaging in exercise and physical activity can:

- 1 Reduce symptoms of depression
- 2 Stop depression from getting worse
- 3 Prevent depression from developing in the first place

Exercise can also improve sleep and general quality of life.

Scan for more information



What should I aim for?

The best exercise routine is one that can be maintained.

- Both aerobic (e.g., jogging, swimming) and anaerobic (e.g., weight training) exercise have been linked to improvements in depression.
- A target of 150-300 minutes of physical activity per week is a good goal to aim for but any amount is a great starting point*.
- Some research suggests higher intensity exercise may be more beneficial for depression but consistency is the most important factor.
- Reducing sedentary behaviour such as sitting for long periods of time is important too.
- Context matters. Leisure or transport related physical activity show the greatest benefits to mental health, compared to domestic and work-related activities. These might include riding to work, parking further from the office or getting off a stop early and walking to and from lunch instead of taking the car.
- Sedentary behaviour, and particularly sedentary behaviour that requires little mental effort (e.g., watching TV and scrolling social media) has been linked to increased risk of future depression.

**In line with WHO guidelines*

Talk to your GP about what is appropriate for you, especially if you have any physical conditions that could affect your capacity for exercise.

But I don't like exercise!

That's ok! Physical activity can take many forms and you may need to think outside the box to find a routine that you like (and can therefore continue!).

Some strategies that may help you make exercise a habit:

Start small

To avoid overwhelm, injury and/or un-enjoyment, start with lower intensity exercise. You can gradually increase the intensity over time.

Make your workout work for you!

An exercise routine that fits your lifestyle and that you can control can be easier to engage with and keep up.

Make it fun!

Love dancing? Join a dance class. Value relationships? Walk with a friend or join a sports team. Linking physical activity to things that you enjoy can help you maintain your motivation.

Make it safe

Mind-body activities like yoga, tai chi, and qi gong have antidepressant benefits and may be more suitable for people with other illnesses or injuries.