



Physical activity for your mental health



This resource talks about how physical activity may affect your mental health. It should be used along with additional information given to you from your family doctor.

Regular physical activity can help you manage many mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and more. Studies show that for people with mental health conditions physical activity can help:



Improve sleep and energy levels

Lower stress and anxiety

Improve memory, concentration, and other brain processes

Reduce the chances of depression getting worse

Reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's and vascular dementia by 20-30%; and improve daily function even after a diagnosis of dementia

Your physical activity can be **enjoyable**, **effective**, and **safe**.



Enjoyable



Some people with mental health conditions find it hard to get started with new activities because of how their condition makes them feel. Being active with others can be a great way to make physical activity more enjoyable and it can sometimes help provide a good distraction.

Trying different activities lets you find what works best for you; it's also okay to change what you are doing from time to time. If you're not sure how to begin, consider attending an exercise class or a walking group in your community.

Effective



Moderate physical activity is the best way to see benefits, even more than vigorous activity.

Exercising outdoors in the fresh air, and better still with a group, is particularly effective for those with mental health conditions.



Safe



The kind of physical activity you can do safely may be affected by your health conditions, your fitness level, and by your current treatments.

Getting started usually means moving 'little but often' with some light walking or similar types of activity. Gradually increase to a level that makes you feel like you are breathing heavier than normal, so that you can talk but not sing. If you feel especially tired, you can try less intense physical activity for a shorter time, or take a day off and try again the next day.

Avoid physical activity and consult your doctor if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Unusual fatigue or weakness
- Chest pain or an irregular pulse
- Difficulty breathing
- Acute illness or infection
- Acute pain or injury
- Unexplained dizzy spells

Helpful resources



Contact the Canadian Mental Health Association (416-789-7957) to find out about support groups and the Ontario Self-Help Research Centre (1-888-283-8806) to find out about groups that are physically active together.

Doctors in the UK have put together a website with informative videos and online pamphlets, including specific advice about physical activity for five different mental health conditions.

<http://www.benefitfromactivity.org.uk/why-am-i-doing-this/conditions/mental-health/>

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