



Battling the Blues.

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Winter can be a hard time for many individuals transitioning from long sunny days, to colder, darker, winter days. Although the excitement of the holidays is just around the corner, many people report feeling blue during the winter months, often attributing this to the decreased amount of sunlight. It should be noted, there is a difference between feeling blue, and having a true diagnosis of depression. However, studies show exercise can reduce your risk of depressive symptoms (e.g. sadness, poor sleep, anxiety, irritability, fatigue) and the diagnosis of depression¹.

The Role of Exercise

One study showed that exercise decreased symptoms of depression, and actually decreased the chance of relapse¹. The intervention of choice was cardiovascular activity (cycling or walking) to reach 70-85% of maximum heart rate, for 30 minutes, three times per week. A 10 minute warm up and 5 minute cooldown were incorporated as well (totaling 45 minutes of exercise). The study lasted for 16 weeks. The Exercise Group was compared to a Medication Group (non-exercise group) taking medication for depression, and a third Combined Group with exercise and medication combined. The results showed participants in the Exercise Group only, exhibited higher rates of recovery from depression (even at the 6 month follow up). Similar results have been shown with weight lifting interventions². Participants performed a supervised weight lifting program for 10 weeks, and followed up with a 10 week program of unsupervised weight lifting. The exercise program was performed 3 times per week for 45 minutes, performing 3 sets of 8 repetitions in large muscle groups. Participants showed improvements in depression at both 20 weeks and 26 months follow up.

Get Real and Get Moving

Most people find it difficult to prioritize time to exercise. General excuses include busyness, lack of access to equipment, fatigue and possibly self-consciousness. The reality is, making time for your health should be a top priority. Evidence supports that exercise can decrease the risks of depression^{1,2} and has been shown to improve cardiovascular function³, decrease pain levels in arthritic conditions⁴, and decrease fall risk⁵. Walking requires no equipment and is a practical option for most individuals. Another option may be speaking with your primary care provider to see what might be the best and safest option for you. Physical therapy can be a starting place for individuals with more complex conditions (e.g. neurological conditions, current or past injuries, severe obesity) in order to get a specific and individualized exercise program. No matter what you choose, get moving, get outside, pick an activity that you enjoy and stick with it! Your mind and body will both benefit!

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