



Exercise reduces depression

Jumping on that treadmill or bike is not only good for one's health, but also can help significantly reduce depression, researchers at UT Southwestern Medical Center have found.

The first study to look at exercise alone in treating mild to moderate depression in adults aged 20 to 45 showed that depressive symptoms were reduced almost 50 percent in individuals who participated in 30-minute aerobic exercise sessions three to five times a week.

The results, published in the January issue of the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#), are comparable to results from studies in which patients with mild to moderate depression were treated with antidepressants or cognitive therapy, said Dr. Madhukar Trivedi, professor of psychiatry and director of UT Southwestern's mood disorders research program.

"The effect you find using aerobic exercise alone in treating clinical depression is similar to what you find with antidepressant medications," said Dr. Trivedi, a study author and holder of the Lydia Bryant Test Professorship in Psychiatric Research. "The key is the intensity of the exercise and continuing it for 30 to 35 minutes per day. It's not for the faint of heart."

The study, conducted between July 1998 and October 2001, included 80 people randomly placed into five groups. Two groups participated in moderately intense aerobics consistent with public health recommendations; one of those groups exercised three days a week and the other five days. Another two groups participated in lower-intensity aerobics for three days and five days per week, and a fifth group did stretching flexibility exercises 15 to 20 minutes three days per week. Exercise programs included supervised instruction at the Cooper Institute in Dallas.

Individuals who participated in moderately intense aerobics, such as exercising on a treadmill or stationary bicycle - whether it was for three or five days per week - experienced a decline in depressive symptoms by an average of 47 percent after 12 weeks. Those in the low-intensity exercise groups showed a 30 percent reduction in symptoms, while those in the last group averaged a 29 percent decline.

"Numerous effective treatments for depression are available, yet many people don't seek treatment because of the negative social stigma still associated with the disease," Dr. Trivedi said. "Exercise may offer a viable treatment alternative, particularly as it can be recommended for most individuals."

Experts estimate that only 23 percent of individuals with clinical depression seek treatment for the mental illness and only 10 percent receive adequate treatment. Almost 19 million Americans are thought to suffer from depressive disorders.

Other researchers participating in the study were from the Cooper Institute and from Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary. The study was funded by the National Institute of Mental Health

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