



MENTAL HEALTH:

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

One in four (25%) young Australians experience a mental illness in any given year, with onset typically around mid-late adolescence. Common mental illnesses experienced by young Australians include anxiety disorders (14%), depressive disorders (6%), and substance abuse disorders (5%). People with intellectual disabilities (including Attentional Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder and learning disorders) have increased risk of developing a mental illness with 20-40% experiencing a mental illness of some kind.

Mental illness have been associated with high levels of sedentary behaviour, low levels of physical activity, and poor dietary habits, all of which are risk factors for increasing the likelihood of cardiovascular disease and type-2 diabetes. Initiation and maintenance of behaviour change can often be difficult for people with mental illness, impacting on their psycho-social functioning. Medication side effects can also play a large role on their quality of life. Exercise is effective in both prevention and improvement of mental illness related symptoms.

If you have any concerns about your child and exercise please get in touch with an Accredited Exercise Physiologist who can develop a suitable exercise program.

For full information on mental health conditions please contact the Black Dog Institute.

Why it's important to exercise

While the effects of exercise may be temporary, simple activities can deliver several hours of relief and can quickly elevate depressed mood in many people. A short 10-minute walk is a good way to relieve anxiety and depression in children. There is evidence that starting exercise at a young age will decrease rates of anxiety and depression in children and adolescence. Physical activity may improve their mood by helping the brain cope better with stress.

Exercise has been proven to be effective in targeting the risk factors associated with mental illness by increasing heart health and assisting in regulating dietary urges. Exercise can also provide a safe environment for social communication and engagement. It has also been proven to attenuate and sometimes reverse the negative side effects of commonly prescribed medications.

Things to remember:

- Parents should encourage their children to use less technology and watch less television. To make physical activity fun find a different name for exercise. For example, call it "play time", "active hour", or something else you and your child come up with. It is important that parents lead by example.
- Always involve the whole family. If you have a child with a mental health illness it is important to show them support but you also don't want them to feel as if something is wrong or different about them.
- For many kids with a mental health illness, competitive sports tend to bring them down and make them feel sad. Talk with your child's teacher or coach about integrating more non-competitive physical activities into the school day.
- As a parents, it is important to remember that there are non-competitive ways to incorporate physical activity into your child's daily life. Activities such as riding bikes, skateboarding, swimming, track and field, park activities, martial arts, etc. are fun for kids and involve little competition.
- If your child is involved in sports that do have a competition element, just be aware that some coaches may encourage competitiveness that may make your child uncomfortable, so monitor and act if required.
- Always be sure that your child is warming up prior to exercise and cooling down after exercise.
- Seek the advice of an Accredited Exercise Physiologist to help guide your child to find the most appropriate activity and develop a positive relationship with exercise.



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Types of exercise recommended:

- It is recommended that children participate in 60 minutes of physical activity every day.
- Simple activities, such as blowing bubbles, will teach your children deep breathing skills and get your child outside.
- Playing ball is a fun way to involve your child. This can include throwing a baseball, kicking a football, playing a game of tennis, etc.
- Yoga is proven to be a good exercise on your mind, soul, and body. Buy a few yoga DVDs and pick a time every day to do yoga with your children. To help anxious children practice yoga,

play up the pose names, highlight the breath, and make it fun. Many poses have the name of an animal or an object they can resemble. Let your child use their imagination and “become” the pose. Make noises such as “ruff” when your child exhales in positions such as downward facing dog. Incorporating the fun aspect into yoga will help your child relax and enjoy it.

- A fun activity is to make walking a game. It is encouraged that children walk an average of 12,000 steps each day. To do this, set walking goals for each member of the family, buy inexpensive pedometers, and the first one to reach their walking goal wins.



References:

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