

Exercise Right for

MENTAL HEALTH



It is the sad reality that each year, 1 in 5 Australians will experience a mental illness. That number is almost double the global average, despite this there is still a poor understanding and acceptance of mental illness and it often goes undiagnosed and either untreated or poorly treated.



MENTAL HEALTH

Mental illness can have an impact on a person's cognitive, behavioural and social functioning. Those with a mental illness often struggle to engage in their regular work, social and physical activities to full extent which further impacts the illness as social isolation then often occurs.

Mental illness includes anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar affective disorder and personality disorders.



WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO EXERCISE

There is mounting evidence that suggests exercise is an effective treatment method for people suffering from acute and chronic mental illness, with some studies suggesting that exercise is just as effective, if not more effective than pharmacological intervention in alleviating depressive symptoms.

Exercise can make a big difference in mood and needs to be a fundamental part of mental health treatment. Even one workout a week is known to have great benefits.

Exercise can also counteract the side effects of some medications such as reducing the risk of falling by strengthening muscles and helping control body weight and blood pressure.



THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Higher doses of exercise may be more effective at improving mental illness but people may be less likely to stick to them. As such, start slowly and build up gradually e.g. if you have not been exercising at all, start with a 10-15 minute walk each morning, and gradually increase this to 30 minutes per day
- Set short-term realistic goals for exercising each week (e.g. 3x20 minute walks per week); plan to exercise at specific times of the day that fit in with your lifestyle and write your plan down
- Remember that it can take time for the benefits of exercise to occur. Most exercise studies have shown a significant reduction in depression after eight weeks or more
- It can be helpful to work with an appropriately educated professional such as an Accredited Exercise Physiologist who understands the complexity of the challenges faced with mental health conditions, and has the skills and knowledge to help individuals manage their condition and any barriers they may come up against.

TYPES OF EXERCISES RECOMMENDED

Aerobic exercise and weight lifting have been shown to be effective in treating mental conditions such as major depression. Exercise Right recommends trying a variety of different types of activities and choosing one that you enjoy the most.

You don't have to join a gym –activities such as swimming, walking the dog, jogging whilst listening to music, riding a bike, gardening, bushwalking, yoga and weight-lifting can all be beneficial.

Thirty minutes brisk walking a few times a week is a good general starting point, and can be built on from there.

RIGHT PROFESSIONAL

By consulting an accredited exercise physiologist you will be working with someone who cares about your wellbeing, understands the challenges you face and who has the skills and knowledge to help you manage your condition.

RIGHT PLACE

Walking outdoors

A research team from the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry found that outdoor exercise was associated with increased energy and revitalization, as well as decreased confusion, anger, depression and tension, when compared with exercising indoors.

Outdoor participants in this study also reported enjoying their workouts more and said they were more likely to repeat them than those participants who exercise indoors.

Creating an exercise habit is difficult, but finding one you enjoy can make it easier to come back to - and more likely you'll stick to your program.

If you like sports join a local sports team

Mental health is shown to improve with social interaction, and joining your local Oztag or Netball team will allow you to enjoy exercise whilst being in a community environment.

RIGHT TIME

The best time to exercise depends on when you have the most energy and motivation.

Once you find a time the works for you, try to stick to it. Not only will it become a habit (like brushing your teeth before bed), but studies show that once your body adjusts

to exercising at a specific time each day, it will start to perform better at that time than any other time of the day.

Studies also show that about 60% of people halve their depression score by exercising and more than 40% maintain this for at least three months.