



Depression and How Exercise Helps

Most of us experience being 'down' at some point in our lives. In fact 17.9% of women and 10.4% of men have been diagnosed with depression at some time in their lives.

And although we know it's common, experiencing depression can be a lonely business, especially when you feel the pressure to put on a brave face, and often those around you don't even know what's going on.

While a quick fix for depression would be great, the reality is that for many it is something that has to be managed, often for extended periods. For many of those with family and professional commitments, taking to bed to recover like you do when you have a bad cold is not an option (though very tempting some days) so the practical approach is to look at ways of managing and getting on with your day to day life, while looking after yourself.

While when it comes to depression, a walk in the park won't change your life, any form of exercise does have some benefits. This includes:

- The chemicals that are released when you exercise improve mood
- You sleep better when your body is tired from exercise
- The sense of achievement from sticking to an exercise programme can increase your self esteem

Unfortunately, often when you are feeling overwhelmed the last thing you feel like doing is going for a fast jog round the block, or facing up to a gym full of happy people. Often when you are feeling down on yourself, scheduling in self-care is not a priority. Some of the symptoms of depression are lethargy, fatigue and overwhelming tiredness. This is not the best state of mind to motivate you to get out and about.

If you are someone who has or is experiencing the symptoms of depression, your doctor (or the internet) will have told you that regular exercise is one of the things you can do to manage your health. So what should you do and how much is enough?

The good news is that while the more often you get out the better you feel, starting up with just a walk around the block or a few stretches in front of the television is a good enough start. The trick is to get started, and keep doing it. Aim to get your heart rate up so you are puffing a bit and keep it puffing for 20-40 minutes (depending on your level of fitness and motivation). The effectiveness of exercise comes when you do it regularly. A short walk every second day is better than an hour of hard slog every now and then.

Always remember that you aren't alone. Many exercise professionals are experienced in managing an exercise programme for someone with depression (in fact some will have experienced it themselves). The important part is to make sure you get exercise advice from someone who knows how to help you look after yourself, and isn't going to set you up with an exercise programme that is unrealistic.

Contact details for further information about the exercise industry:

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NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs) - Independent not for profit quality mark of exercise professionals and facilities. Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the “warrant of fitness check” that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver safe exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - www.icreps.org

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Exercise Association of New Zealand - Not for profit exercise industry representative organisation. Its mission is to proactively support a sustainable exercise and fitness industry in New Zealand by growing participation in structured exercise through advocacy, information and industry standards.

