



Exercise for Your Mental Health

We all know the many benefits of exercise on our physical wellness, and arguably as important, is the positive impact of exercise on our wellbeing and mental health.

Exercising, even at a moderate level, can improve mood and create a sense of wellbeing in everyone. For those living with depression or mental health concerns, the benefits of regular exercise can play a significant role in improving mood and sense of wellbeing.

Shane Way is a Hamilton based REPs registered exercise professional and multi award winning personal trainer. Shane has his own mental health journey and specialises in exercise as a mental health solution. Shane says “we know that exercise, physical and mental health have a positive correlation, however I believe the most important thing, and what people really need to be aware of is that it just makes you feel good. It makes you feel more positive, it makes you feel like you can cope, it improves your mood, it increases your self-esteem and improves your overall wellbeing.”

In New Zealand, more than half a million adults (16% of the population) have been diagnosed with depression, bipolar disorder and/or anxiety disorder in their lifetime. This includes 14% of adults who have ever been diagnosed with depression, and 6% with anxiety disorder.

Little or no physical exercise can increase the risk of depression, and a poor diet can decrease your sense of wellbeing, so taking care of yourself needs to be part of any wellness or mental health plan. Shane's experience in the mental health sector echoes this and as he says, “If you are prone to mental health issues and decide not to exercise and eat poorly, it's almost like an invitation for depression to come back into your life, or if you're currently suffering, letting it consume you. The feedback I get directly from the clients I work with is how much better they feel after exercising with me - it's nothing overly strenuous - some low impact physical activity, yoga and mindfulness”.

There is a good reason why exercise is recommended for improving mood. Endorphins are the ‘happy hormones’ that the body releases when moving. Endorphins contribute to a feeling of wellness post exercise, and are released most effectively during long, continuous periods of exercise, of a moderate to high intensity.

The New Zealand Mental Health Foundation tells us there are 3 main ways exercise and physical activity positively contributes to our mental health:

- Biochemically through endorphins.
- Physiologically by improving muscle strength and heart function, increasing blood flow to the brain improving your sleep.
- Psychologically by improving self-esteem and giving you a sense of positive achievement.

It's often hard to get motivated to exercise and be active when you are feeling low, but the benefits far outweigh the effort. Shane recommends taking these steps to make getting active easier:

Start off small - Start where you are comfortable and with people you trust. This will help to make motivation easier as it's not overwhelming. Go for a walk with a close friend, in an area you are familiar with, and set an achievable goal. This will boost your confidence, increase your self-esteem, increase your motivation, and start to create a positive relationship with physical activity.

Take baby Steps - Understand that like everything in life, getting into physical activity is a journey. You will have days where you feel low, and feel unmotivated. That's normal. Start off with baby steps and plan 2 short walks in a week, then 3, then 4. Before you know it you'll be walking daily and not because you should, but because you want to!

Be kind to yourself - There is going to be the odd day that even though you know the benefits outweigh the feeling of being low, you will choose the feeling low option. You will stay in bed, you will skip a workout, and that's part of the journey. Don't beat yourself up over it. Take a deep breathe, analyse what held you back and how much it affects you to feel depressed, and how much you want to feel better. It's about learning from our mistakes, getting back up and moving forward.

If you would like more information about the benefits of using physical activity and exercise to improve your mood and mental health, then ask your local REPs registered personal trainer for an information brochure titled 'Move for mood and mental health' for ideas on how to make changes today.

References:

<http://www.depression.org.nz>

<https://www.ranzcp.org>

This fact sheet supports using a gym, worth a direct link:

http://www.depression.org.nz/ContentFiles/Media/PDF/Getting_active.pdf

Contact details for further information about the exercise industry:

NZ Register of Exercise Professionals, Registrar Stephen Gacsal

Email: stephen@reps.org.nz telephone: 0800 55 44 99 website: www.reps.org.nz

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

Exercise Association of New Zealand, Chief Executive Richard Beddie

Email: richard@exercisenz.org.nz, telephone: 0800 66 88 11 website: <http://www.exercisenz.org.nz>

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.*

