

Increasing exercise

Exercise addresses several of the factors causing depression, including the brain's mood chemicals. Even very moderate exercise can make a big difference to your mood. Increasing enjoyable exercise is one of the most effective strategies for tackling depression.


This worksheet will help you evaluate your current levels of activity and plan enjoyable ways to increase your activity and exercise levels, as an important strategy to combat depression as well as improving your health and wellbeing generally.

1. Keep an exercise diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of your daily physical activity and exercise, making a note of how vigorous it was, how long it was and ratings of pleasure and achievement, plus any notes or comments relating to your thoughts or mood before, during and after the activity. Keep the record for at least a week.

Consider:

What do you notice about your activity and exercise levels? Do you notice any patterns relating to your mood? Is there room to increase the levels of exercise in your weekly routine? Are there any thoughts or attitudes preventing you from benefiting from this powerful depression-beating strategy?



"I've found that physical exercise plays a massive role in fighting low mood and depression. If I go for a run each evening it gives me a chance to get my day's thoughts into some kind of coherent structure, discarding things that are rubbish and that I'd otherwise think about too much. Then it makes me sleep better." – Andy

My exercise evaluation summary:

Brainstorm:

Read the 'Increasing exercise' page and brainstorm ideas for ways to increase the amount of exercise you do. Try to focus on exercise ideas which offer the possibility of enjoyment and/or social interaction, rather than those which you do not feel at all attracted to!

My ideas for exercise:

- _____
- _____
- _____

- _____
- _____

2. My exercise plan

Decide which idea on your list would be the easiest and/or most enjoyable to try out. Write an intention statement to help you plan what, how, when, and where you will do to exercise more in the coming week.

Example:

I will walk (what) the long way home through the park (where) after lectures on Tuesday and Thursday this week (when) with Tom, or listening to my 'happy' music while I walk (how).

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

Ask Tom if he wants to come with me
Make sure I put my iPod and umbrella in my bag for backup
Make a backup plan that if I miss doing this (eg if it's raining too much) I will walk round the block later on instead.

My exercise intention statement:

I will _____ (what)
_____ (when)
_____ (where)
_____ (how/long)

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

3. Evaluation

Don't give yourself unrealistic or self-punishing goals. Take things gently and build up your exercise levels gradually. Choose one exercise aim at a time, and keep trying until you find something that works for you. Then build up to include a variety of exercise. Work on other aspects of your daily routine, like eating and sleep strategies, to support the changes you are trying to make in your exercise habits. Use the diary to check your progress after a while.

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