

Do you Get Enough Exercise for Good Mental Health (Depression)

DO YOU/CAN YOU
DO THIS?

SHORT WELLNESS SELF-
CHECKS

It's well-established that exercise can improve mental health, and potentially even alleviate or prevent depression. There's a lot of literature suggesting that people who are depressed and taking antidepressants who also exercise generally do better than people who just take antidepressants. **But how much is enough to see a change?** According to 2018 Time Article researchers analyzed data provided by more than 1.2 million U.S. adults who responded to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey between 2011 and 2015 and reported on average, people reported 3.36 days of poor mental health per month. But those who said they exercised — through activities ranging from housework to running — experienced about 1.5 fewer gloomy days per month than sedentary peers, according to the research. When digging further into the numbers, the researchers noticed an interesting pattern: **People who exercised for a moderate amount of time (about 45 minutes per session) saw better mental health results than those who favored marathon workouts. Also times per week mattered: three to five times a week was associated with a bigger reduction in poor mental health days than either not exercising at all or hitting the gym more than five times a week, according to the research. Together, these results led the researchers to conclude that exercising for two to six hours a week may be the sweet spot for mental health. The authors speculate that excessive exercise may be indicative of mental health issues. Some people get obsessed with exercise, and some people run themselves into the ground. You can definitely see why someone who's exercising a lot, or maybe obsessively, might have worse mental health.** Researchers found that certain types of exercise were associated with slightly more mental health benefits than others. Team sports led the pack with a 22.3% reduction in mental health burden, followed by cycling (21.6%) and aerobic/gym exercises (20.1%). In a separate analysis, Chekroud and his colleagues also found that mindfulness exercises, such as yoga and tai chi, bestowed better mental health benefits than walking and many other types of exercise. These findings are in line with research that says social support and mindfulness may each improve mental health.

According to Harvard Health 1 in 10 adults in the United States struggles with depression, and antidepressant medications are a common way to treat the condition. However, pills aren't the only solution. Research shows that exercise is also an effective treatment. **"For some people it works as well as antidepressants, although exercise alone isn't enough for someone with severe depression,"** says Dr. Michael Craig Miller, assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. Exercising starts a biological cascade of events that results in many health benefits. High-intensity exercise releases the body's feel-good chemicals called endorphins, resulting in the "runner's high" that joggers report. But for most of us, the real value is in low-intensity exercise sustained over time. That kind of activity spurs the release of proteins called neurotrophic or growth factors, which cause nerve cells to grow and make new connections. The improvement in brain function makes you feel better. "In people who are depressed, neuroscientists have noticed that the hippocampus in the brain — the region that helps regulate mood — is smaller. Exercise supports nerve cell growth in the hippocampus, improving nerve cell connections, which helps relieve depression. See Review Based on a review, which examined most or all RCTs published in 1999–2016, and most or all meta-analyses/systematic reviews published in 2009–2016, it can be stated that exercise is an evidenced-based medicine for depression — at least as an add-on to antidepressants. See other Study