

# LFR MEDS

## BUILDING VARIETY INTO YOUR EXERCISE ROUTINE

On March 2, 2022, the World Health Organization announced, "In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25%." With so many struggling with mental health issues right now, accessible, simple options that can help us improve negative symptoms are especially important, such as physical activity. It's an affordable self-help hack anyone can do. Although, many don't.

### Why physical activity helps improve symptoms of anxiety and depression

Exercise affects neurotransmitters and several other biochemical responses that are implicated in things like anxiety, depression, stress reactivity, mood, cognitive flexibility. In general, depression is all about your nervous system being, well, depressed. Physical activity is typically about activation and movement. Exercise can help depression by promoting that overall bodily sense of homeostasis metabolically, cardiovascularly, physically, and mentally. Physical activity literally targets some of the core symptoms of depression. If done in healthy ways, exercise can facilitate feelings of accomplishment, self-efficacy, and positive self-evaluation. From a physiological standpoint, exercise can serve as a regulator of emotion by directly affecting the nervous system as well as providing a distraction from anxiety-producing environmental stimuli. Exercise can encourage deeper breathing, improved metabolic profiles, and improved physical abilities.

### Is there proof that physical activity helps to deal with depression and anxiety?

Science is constantly evolving, but as of now, it's well documented that exercise helps to improve depression and anxiety. Research has concluded that physical activity can be as effective as anti-depressants.

### How much exercise and what kind is typically needed to improve anxiety and depression?

For a straightforward formula (for those who like to check off boxes), 20-30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise most, if not all days of the week for a sustained period of at least 12-16 weeks.

It doesn't take much to make a big impact. Too many people have misconceptions that exercise must be a High-Intensity Interval Training ("HIIT") workout, or other forms of exhaustive nonsense. The literature is quite clear that simply staying active is important. Walk a little more, sit a little less, literally stop and smell the roses while you are out and about, do a mindful form of movement like yoga or tai chi, ride a bike, tend to a garden, etc. You can get enough exercise just by keeping your body moving and limiting modern society's "conveniences" that result in sedentary behavior.

### The bottom line about anxiety, depression, and physical activity

After more than two years, this pandemic might be shifting to endemic (or not). For that and other reasons, we remain in a time of heightened emotions that includes extra fear and sadness. The good news is that we all have affordable, sensible aid at our fingertips: physical activity. If you want some relief from emotional unrest, you will probably benefit from finding gratifying physical activity. Maybe it feels good, results in feelings of accomplishment, provides social opportunities, or offers some other personal plus. If you find satisfaction in what you're doing, you're likely to keep it up. Don't worry about what's the best form of exercise. There is no 'best' exercise. Anyone who tells you what to do, or why their form of exercise is the best, is usually selling something. So never overlook the financial incentive of programs that claim to have answers or be the best.

Physical activity can be an effective antidote to depression, a form of anxiety management, and a typically reliable method for boosting mental health. After a rough couple of years where exercise was often limited, reduced, or nonexistent due to lockdowns, right now could be a fantastic time to give the healing powers of physical activity a try.