

6 Ways to Support Your Clients' Mental & Physical Well-Being



What Are The Benefits Of Physical Activity On Mental Well-Being?

Regular physical activity provides several long-term benefits that can help prevent and treat mental health disorders.

- Meeting the recommended levels of aerobic physical activity is associated with at least a 20% lower risk of depression and anxiety in adults.
- Studies show that physical activity can be as effective as cognitive behavioral therapy or medications in treating chronic depression or anxiety.
- Consider a multi-modal therapeutic approach of physical activity, counseling and/or medications.

A single bout of activity can have immediate mental health benefits.

- It can enhance mood, energy and focus, as well as reduce anxiety, depression, anger and tension.
- Even short durations (15-20 minutes) can have immediate mental health benefits.

How Can You Best Support Your Clients' Mental Well-Being?

Balance client preferences with evidence-based practices. A physical activity program will not benefit a client who does not adhere to it or lacks the confidence or interest to perform the activity.

1. What do they like to do? Identify and encourage activities that best fit each client's preferences and abilities. Aerobic, resistance and mind-body exercises and of light, moderate or vigorous intensity all benefit mental well-being. Greater enjoyment of the activity can be more mentally beneficial.

- 2. How confident are they?** Help identify activities that are in line with your client's self-efficacy or confidence in their ability to take part. Then focus on incremental improvements toward mastering these activities. This can enhance adherence, enjoyment and overall mental wellness.
- 3. What are their barriers?** It can be challenging to engage in physical activity when having symptoms of stress, depression or anxiety. Discuss your client's barriers to being active and provide strategies to help them continue to engage in activity.
- 4. What motivation do they need?** Increase the likelihood of adherence with regular follow up on progress to help motivate and encourage clients toward achieving goals.
- 5. Do they have social support?** Help your client identify avenues for social support. This can help with program adherence and provide mental health benefits through positive social interactions.
- 6. Can you take it outside?** Consider a training session outside or encourage outdoor activities. Time spent in nature and exercising outdoors can help relieve stress, increase energy and boost mood.

Author: Amanda Paluch, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Amherst

References:

2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee. 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Scientific Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018.

Biddle S. Physical activity and mental health: evidence is growing. *World Psychiatry*. 2016;15(2):176-177. doi:10.1002/wps.20331

Cooper SL. Promoting Physical Activity for Mental Well-Being. *ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal*. 2020;24(3):12-16. doi:10.1249/FIT.0000000000000569

Thompson Coon J, Boddy K, Stein K, Whear R, Barton J, Depledge MH. Does participating in physical activity in outdoor natural environments have a greater effect on physical and mental wellbeing than physical activity indoors? A systematic review. *Environ Sci Technol*. 2011;45(5):1761-1772. doi:10.1021/es102947t