



Mental Health

Background

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. Mental health is important at every stage of life.

Mental and physical health are equally important and interrelated components of overall health. For example, depression can increase the risk of long-lasting conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Similarly, chronic conditions can increase the risk of mental illness.

Mental health can change over time when demands placed on an individual exceed their resources and coping abilities. For example, working long hours, caring for relatives or experiencing economic hardships can worsen mental health.

More than one in five U.S. adults experience a mental health condition each year, with higher rates in females than males and higher rates in those 18-25 years of age than older age groups. Anxiety affects more than 42 million U.S. adults, and depression affects 21 million U.S. adults. Depression and anxiety result in the loss of \$1 trillion per year in productivity around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a 25% increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide. The incidences of anxiety and depression are increasing in youth as well.

Standard treatments for mild to moderate depression and anxiety include psychotherapy and, where necessary, pharmaceutical treatment. However, while the incidence of mental illness is increasing, fewer individuals are getting appropriate treatment.

Meta-analyses reveal evidence that physical activity/exercise can reduce anxiety and depression in children and adolescents; young, middle aged and older adults; postpartum women; cancer survivors; and those with type 2 diabetes, multiple sclerosis and other chronic diseases.

Strong evidence suggests physically active youth become active adults and physically active parents have active children. Being physically active reduces your risk of developing anxiety and depression. Less than 25% of U.S. adults meet the physical activity guidelines, while only 21% of U.S. children meet the guidelines. Therefore, it is imperative to promote physical activity across the lifespan to prevent and effectively treat anxiety and depression.

Government and policy leaders at all levels can support the inclusion of physical activity as a tool and interventional strategy to address the obesity epidemic by:

- Backing the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program (CFDA 84.424A) under Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which will go a long way to ensure that well-funded physical education programs improve our national health and our physical readiness for global threats to national security.
- Sponsoring other legislation, including the Personal Health Investment Today (PHIT) Act, which will increase activity through tax incentives.
- Supporting the Promoting Physical Activity for Americans Act, which will benefit Americans with a regular report to guide physical activity efforts and help fight the growing obesity epidemic.
- Promoting federal legislation supporting safe, active transportation for all.

ACSM Position

The American College of Sports Medicine® (ACSM) supports legislation that promotes physical activity as a means to improve mental health. As an organization dedicated to advancing health, we recognize the critical link between physical activity and mental well-being. Extensive research has shown that regular physical activity can significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress. ACSM is committed to advocating for policies that foster both physical and mental health.