

Being Active When You Have Depression and Anxiety

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Do you want to feel better, move better and sleep better? Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward better health – even just a few minutes!

Studies show that physical activity can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety as effectively

as medication—and without unwanted side effects. Even a little bit of lower-intensity activity can help. Greater amounts of more vigorous exercise have an even bigger effect. Exercise also decreases symptoms of anxiety, both overall and in the moment.

Both aerobic activity and strength training can be used to manage depression and anxiety alone or with other treatments like medication and therapy. Talk with your health care provider about what may work best for you.



Getting Started

Start Small

If you have trouble working up the energy or motivation to exercise, find an activity you'll enjoy and set small, realistic goals. Begin with short periods (like 5, 10 or 15 minutes, or set a goal to walk around the block). Gradually progress.

Reach out

Being active with others can improve your mood and help you get out of a sad or anxious frame of mind. Join an activity club, sports team or online activity group. Find an activity buddy and meet regularly doing something you both enjoy.

Motivation

What will help you stick with an activity plan? Some people find it helpful to schedule activity at a certain time of day. Others give themselves a fitness challenge.

Be Active Outside

You'll benefit from being active outdoors or in nature, particularly if you have Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Bundle up in winter to benefit from this natural form of light therapy!

To stay safe and injury free:

- Start with light to medium effort.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow!
- Warm up and cool down (easy pace) before and after exercise.

Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Build up from doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like a brisk walk, light cycling or water exercise) or 75 minutes/week of vigorous activity (like jogging, singles tennis or hiking hills).

What?	How often?	How hard?	How much?
Any rhythmic activity	3–5 days/week	Fairly light to somewhat hard	Start with a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30-60 minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. Be active however and wherever you can. To lose weight, do twice as much activity.

Aerobic Activity Cautions:

- Some psychotropic medications can cause dizziness, slower movement and coordination problems, especially when you first start taking them or change your dosage. Check with your health care provider about these effects.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after exercise.

Strength Training

Strength training, for example working with weights or resistance bands, makes you stronger and improves your overall health. Plus, strength training can make daily activities like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer.

What?	How often?	How hard?	How much?
Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body (for example, kitchen counter push-ups or chair squats)	At least 2 days/week *Rest day in between	Start with light effort. Build up to medium or hard effort.	10-15 repetitions to start (for each major muscle group). Build up to 8-12 reps of challenging effort. Repeat 2-4 times.

Other Types of Physical Activity

Yoga, Pilates and tai chi can improve your mood and have been shown to help many people with depression or anxiety. To improve flexibility, stretch a muscle to the point of feeling tightness for 10-30 seconds (30-60 seconds for older adults).

How will I get started **this week?** _____
