

Integration of Exercise Intervention for Mental Health

Exercise can benefit our physical health, but evidence has shown that physical activity can have the potential to have quality of life improvements for those who suffer from mental health diagnoses.¹ It has been shown to reduce anxiety and depression and aids in improving self-esteem and cognitive functioning in addition to alleviation of corresponding symptoms like social withdrawal and low self-esteem.^{2 3}

Additionally, evidence has shown that exercise aids teens in:⁴

- Positively impacting levels of serotonin (helps regulate mental health)
- Releases endorphins, which are the natural “happy chemicals” in the body
- Lowers the hormone of cortisol which contributes to stress
- Improves mood by stimulating the neurotransmitter norepinephrine
- Aids in sleep for teens

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, adolescents should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Part of the 60 minutes of exercise should include:⁵

- Aerobic activity at least three times per week
- Muscle strengthening at least three times per week
- Bone strengthening at least three times per week

Aerobic exercises that have been proven to reduce anxiety and depression include jogging, swimming, cycling, walking, gardening, and dancing.³

Families and caregivers can help their child get enough exercise by:

- Start early: encouraging movement as young as possible can help build the foundation for the importance of exercise
- Provide time for both structured and unstructured physical activity during school and outside of school: this can be through sports, after school programs and being active with family and friends
- Provide them with positive feedback and model the activity to your children: Praise, rewards, and encouragement can help youth to be and stay active. Being active as a family is a great way to model and encourage physical activity.
- Help them learn the skills required to do physical activity safely: Aid in helping your child understand how to regulate the intensity of activity, increase physical activity gradually over time, set goals, use protective gear and proper equipment, follow rules, and avoid injuries.
- Promote activities that set the basis for a lifetime of activity: Adolescents should be exposed to a variety of activities, including active recreation, team sports, and individual sports. This way, they can find activities they can do well and enjoy, including activities that adults commonly do, such as jogging, bicycling, hiking, swimming, exercise classes, and strength training.
 - Young people should experience noncompetitive activities, and activities that do not require above-average athletic skills.

¹ Richardson, C., Faulkner, G., McDevitt, J., Skrinar, G., Hutchinson, D. and Piette, J., 2005. Integrating Physical Activity Into Mental Health Services for Persons With Serious Mental Illness. *Psychiatric Services*, 56(3), pp.324-331.

² Callaghan P.. Exercise: a neglected intervention in mental health care? *J Psychiatr Ment Health Nurs*. 2004;11:476-483.

³ Guskowska M.. Effects of exercise on anxiety, depression and mood [in Polish] *Psychiatr Pol*. 2004;38:611-620.

⁴ Monroe Jr, J., 2018. *Get Moving: The Benefits of Exercise for Teen Mental Health*. [online] U.S. News and World Repo. Available at: <<https://health.usnews.com/health-care/for-better/articles/2018-05-28/get-moving-the-benefits-of-exercise-for-teen-mental-health>> [Accessed 19 November 2021].

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.