

Intense Exercise Improves Depression

Many studies have found that low to moderate intensity exercise can improve depression. Both aerobic activities and anaerobic activities, like weight training, have been shown to reduce depressive symptoms.

Exercise exerts its anti-depressive effects by raising specific brain neurotransmitters (serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine) that increase mood as well as our body's natural "feel good" painkillers (endorphins). It also improves mood by raising self esteem and providing a sense of accomplishment.

Until recently, most research has centered on low to moderate intensity aerobic exercise. This level of exercise can, indeed, produce anti-depressive changes in the brain and can improve self efficacy and self esteem.

Studies have shown that individuals who exercised on a low to moderate scale, showed similar reductions in depressed mood when compared to combining exercise and medication. The newest research has demonstrated that intense exercise alone is often as effective as taking anti-depressants for mild to moderate depression.

One study revealed that a group of individuals who participated in an intense exercise program experienced a decline in depressive symptoms by 47% after a 12 weeks. The low-intensity exercise group also showed a reduction in depressive symptoms but only by 30%. No medications were used in this study.

Intense exercise is now the preferred exercise mode to combat many health conditions including obesity, cardiovascular disease, respiratory dysfunction, diabetes and more. Long slow cardio is no longer considered the "healthiest" form of exercise. Long slow aerobics should only be used by those with cautionary medical conditions.

Raising your intensity doesn't mean you have to go 100%. One of the best ways to gain the anti-depressive effects of intense exercise is to do interval training. This means hard/recovery. For example, you might ride the stationary bike for 3 minutes hard (about 80-90%) and then recover at an easy pace for 3 minutes. If you haven't worked at a high intensity for awhile, drop the intensity or duration of the work periods and build up slowly. Interval training is shorter in duration with fifteen to twenty minutes being plenty.

In the case of depression, intense exercise is probably more effective because it increases metabolic rate for hours, further raises anti-depressant neurotransmitters and elicits higher endorphin rates. Remember that low intensity exercise also improves depression, but to a lesser extent. There is also a greater chance of gaining a sense of accomplishment and self esteem from completing a good hard workout versus an easier one.

One major problem with prescribing any level of exercise for mild to moderately depressed patients, is they are often too depressed to get up and exercise. This would be more true if one were trying to motivate themselves to exercise hard in a depressed state.

About the Author

Dr. Lanny Schaffer is an Exercise Physiologist and the President of The International Fitness Academy. For more savvy information on fitness and the body mind connection go to <http://www.aerobic-exercise-coach.com>

Source: <http://www.articletrader.com>