

Managing depression with exercise



What this fact sheet covers:

- Helpful strategies to motivate you to become more active
- Where to get help

Feeling tired and less motivated are two very common symptoms of depression. This means that exercise is often the last thing people feel like doing when they are feeling depressed. The following strategies can help motivate you to gradually become more active.

Make a plan

Start slowly and build up gradually, e.g. if you have not been exercising at all, start with a 10-15 minute walk each morning, and gradually increase this to 30 minutes per day.

Set short-term realistic goals for exercising each week (e.g. 3 x 20-minute walks per week); plan to exercise at specific times of the day that fit in with your lifestyle and write your plan down.

A range of health professionals can assist with increasing your activity level (see the 'Where to get help' section in this fact sheet).

Keep motivated

- Keep an activity diary to document your daily exercise.
- A pedometer can be helpful in keeping track of your activity levels.
- Reward yourself when you achieve your short-term exercise goals.

NB: If you are new to exercise, pregnant, a smoker, or overweight, or have heart disease or major health problems, it is recommended that you seek medical advice before commencing an exercise program.

Keep it up

- You don't have to join a gym – try a few different activities to find those you enjoy (e.g. walking the dog, jogging, riding a bike, gardening, bushwalking, yoga, weight-lifting).
- Give yourself a break – if you don't stick to your exercise plan, simply start again from where you left off.
- Remember that it can take time for the benefits of exercise to occur. Most exercise studies have shown a significant reduction in depression after eight weeks or more.
- Get other people involved – ask a friend, partner or relative to join you. Although it is common to not feel like socialising when experiencing depression, it can be helpful to include others in exercise so that you feel supported and motivated.
- Write down the benefits you would like to gain from exercise, and refer to these to help with motivation (e.g. to reduce stress, improve mood, get in shape and improve sleep).
- Write down the situations you expect would make it difficult to exercise, and develop a plan to address them. For example, if it rains, go for a walk in a shopping centre; if you feel too tired for a full exercise session, go for a 10-minute walk.



Where to get help

If you are new to exercise, pregnant, a smoker, or overweight, or have heart disease or major health problems, it is recommended that you seek medical advice before commencing an exercise program. The following health professionals can assist in this process:

- **Exercise physiologists** are university-qualified allied health professionals who specialise in the delivery of exercise, lifestyle and behavioural programs for the prevention and management of chronic conditions (including depression) and injuries. People who have ongoing health conditions (e.g. depression) may be able to receive Medicare rebates for up to five sessions with an exercise physiologist if their GP has prepared a Chronic Disease Management Plan for them. For more information on exercise physiologists (and to find an exercise physiologist in your area), visit www.essa.org.au. Visit www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/chronic-medical-condition-assistance or speak to a GP to find out more about your eligibility to receive the Medicare rebates.
- **General practitioners (GPs)** may be able to provide advice and information about depression and exercise, and can provide a referral to a qualified exercise physiologist under Medicare.
- **Psychologists and clinical psychologists** can assist with activity scheduling, increasing your motivation to exercise, and problem-solving to overcome barriers to exercise.

Organisations that provide facilities and services for exercise include council recreation centres, gyms and sports clubs, and community health centres.

Contact us

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