

## A NEW YEARS RESOLUTION – EXERCISE - TO FEEL GOOD!

### EXERCISE IMPROVES MOOD & SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY



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When you're feeling anxious or depressed, finding the motivation to exercise may feel impossible. But if you understand how exercise can reward you almost IMMEDIATELY, you may be more likely to give it a try. We'd like to offer some scientifically proven evidence for you to consider, to help inform you so that you may be empowered to act to improve your lifestyle and how you feel:

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- ❖ Exercise causes the release of brain chemicals (i.e. endorphins and neurochemicals including the ones that antidepressant medications target) that elevate mood and lessen depression.
- ❖ Research has shown that regular exercise improves mood and functioning. People who regularly exercise are shown to be less anxious, less depressed, less angry, have higher levels of energy, motivation, concentration, better learning ability, and are more socially outgoing compared to people who don't.
- ❖ Exercise increases body temperature and acts to physically burn internal energy that then leaves you feeling calmer and less anxious.
- ❖ Exercise helps distract you from worries that fuel negative thoughts and feelings.
- ❖ Exercise promotes better sleep including helping you fall asleep faster, sleep more deeply and awaken more easily in the morning. (If you don't do it too close to bedtime which may instead act to awaken)
- ❖ Exercise can help you feel better about yourself. When you succeed in maintaining a regular exercise program, you gain a sense of accomplishment that promotes self-confidence, self-esteem, and the realization of your internal strength and power.
- ❖ Exercise can help you look better. Regular exercise helps you manage your weight by burning calories and building muscle tone which increases your metabolism, so your body continues to burn more calories even when you're not exercising.
- ❖ Exercise has been shown to rev up your sex life by improving circulation, sexual desire, functioning and satisfaction especially as people get older.

- ❖ Exercise is a healthy coping strategy that can be used when you feel “stressed”. It can replace non-healthy approaches to coping with stress that are commonly used (ie drinking alcohol, overeating, or overspending).
- ❖ Exercise has been shown to prevent people from developing depression in the future.

### **EXERCISE AS MEDICINE**

Consider exercise as important as a prescription you receive from your doctor because it is! It has the power to improve, prevent and even cure illnesses. *BEWARE:* Exercise, like other treatments for depression and anxiety, has the following possible side effects: *It can prevent and improve many chronic medical conditions, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, diabetes, arthritis, osteoporosis, pain, abnormal lipids or cholesterol and some cancers.*

### **GETTING STARTED**

Consult with your medical doctor to determine which activities and what intensity of exercise is healthy for you considering any health conditions you have and medications you take. While the exact ‘dose’ of exercise that is necessary for improving mood and anxiety is not known, what is known is- **SOME IS GOOD and MORE IS BETTER!** We recommend that you begin with an easily doable amount and build on it. Perhaps begin by exercising 10-15 minutes, 2-3 times per week. Over time, you can increase the length and intensity of your exercise program. One recommended strategy is to add 10 minutes each week to work up to 30 minutes, 5 times per week.

### **MAKE IT FUN**

- ❖ Include friends, family, and pets who you enjoy being with and make it a regular “medical appointment” that you meet for several times each week.
- ❖ Choose to exercise in places where you feel safe and enjoy being, for example, outside where you’re surrounded by nature or inside a shopping area.
- ❖ Choose types of exercise that are fun for you, whether it’s walking, swimming, biking or even jumping rope. Add more activity to your daily lifestyle like gardening, walking the dog, using the car less and walking to the store, cleaning the house, using the stairs instead of elevators. Be creative and consider active hobbies that you can add to your lifestyle, for instance, playing outdoor games with your kids and grandkids, going bowling or taking your sweetie out dancing.
- ❖ Set up reasonable and doable goals. Give yourself credit each time you follow through! Expect to and be understanding of yourself when you skip it once in a while. Remember the goal is not to have a ‘perfect’ exercise routine or one that makes you feel bad if you don’t do it just right.

The goal is to have a livable one. Not one that you “should” do but one that you LIKE doing because it makes you FEEL GOOD!

**CALL FOR APPOINTMENT**

Clinical depression and anxiety disorders are diagnosed when you have mood symptoms that last several days or more without improvement and are associated with related physical impairment. If you have severe symptoms or suicidal thoughts, you should schedule an appointment to be evaluated right away. Although exercise can be beneficial and a successful treatment for anxiety and depression symptoms, counseling and/or medication might also be part of your recommended treatment plan.

[SOURCES: Spark, Ratey, Jan 2008; Mayo Foundation for Medical Education & Research, July/Oct 2009]