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The Benefits of Physical Activity on Mental Health

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Abstract: Many people find that being active is good for both their physical and mental health, and there's increasing evidence to support this. In fact, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence(NICE), recommends three sessions of group exercise lasting at least 45 minutes a week as one of the first treatments for mild-to-moderate depression. In addition to the apparent physical health benefits, physical activity also affects mental health positively. Physically inactive individuals have been reported to have higher rates of morbidity and healthcare expenditures. Commonly, exercise therapy is recommended to combat these challenges and preserve mental wellness. According to empirical investigations, physical activity is positively associated with certain mental health traits. In nonclinical investigations, the most significant effects of physical exercise have been on self-concept and body image. An attempt to review the current understanding of the physiological and psychological mechanisms by which exercise improves mental health is presented in this review article. Regular physical activity improves the functioning of the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis. Depression and anxiety appear to be influenced by physical exercise, but to a smaller extent in the population than in clinical patients. Numerous hypotheses attempt to explain the connection between physical fitness and mental wellness. Physical activity was shown to help with sleep and improve various psychiatric disorders. Exercise in general is associated with a better mood and improved quality of life. Physical exercise and yoga may help in the management of cravings for substances, especially in people who may not have access to other forms of therapy. Evidence suggests that increased physical activity can help attenuate some psychotic symptoms and treat medical comorbidities that accompany psychotic disorders. The dearth of literature in the Indian context also indicated that more research was needed to evaluate and implement interventions for physical activity tailored to the Indian context.

Keywords: anxiety, depression, morbidity, mental health, physical activity.

Introduction and background - Physical activity has its origins in ancient history. It is thought that the Indus Valley civilization created the foundation of modern yoga in approximately 3000 B.C. during the early Bronze Age.The beneficial role of physical activity in healthy living and preventing and managing health disorders is well documented in the literature. Physical activity provides various significant health benefits. Mechanical stress and repeated exposure to gravitational forces created by frequent physical exercise increase a variety of characteristics, including physical strength, endurance, bone mineral density, and neuromusculoskeletal fitness, all of which contribute to a functional and independent existence. Exercise, defined as planned, systematic, and repetitive physical activity, enhances athletic performance by improving body composition, fitness, and motor abilities. The function of physical activity in preventing a wide range of chronic illnesses and premature mortality has been extensively examined and studied. Adequate evidence links medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease and individual lifestyle behaviours, particularly exercise. Regular exercise lowered the incidence of cardiometabolic illness, breast and colon cancer, and osteoporosis. In addition to improving the quality of life for those with non-psychiatric diseases such as peripheral artery occlusive disease and fibromyalgia, regular physical activity may help alleviate the discomforts of these particular diseases . Exercise also helps with various substance use disorders, such as reducing or quitting smoking. As physical exercise strongly impacts health, worldwide standards prescribe a weekly allowance of "150 minutes" of modest to vigorous physical exercise in clinical and non-clinical populations. When these recommendations are followed, many chronic diseases can be reduced by 20%-30%. Furthermore, thorough evaluations of global studies have discovered that a small amount of physical exercise is sufficient to provide health benefits.

How does physical activity improve mental health?

Physical activity is not just about aerobic capacity and muscle size. Sure, exercise can improve your physical health and your physique, trim your waistline, improve your sex life, and even add years to your life. But that's not what motivates most people to stay active.People who physical activity regularly tend to do so because it gives them an enormous sense of well-being. They feel more energetic throughout the day, sleep better at night, have sharper memories, and feel more relaxed and positive about themselves and their lives. And it's also a powerful medicine for many common mental health challenges.Regular physical activity can have a profoundly positive impact on depression, anxiety, and ADHD. It also relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your overall mood. And you don't have to be a fitness fanatic to reap the benefits. No matter your age or fitness level, you can learn to use physical activity as a powerful tool to deal with mental health problems, improve your energy and outlook, and get more out of life.

Benefits of physical activity on depression: Studies show that physical activity can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication—but without the side-effects, of course. As one example, a 2019 study done by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that running for 15 minutes a day or walking for an hour may reduce the risk of major depression by 26 percent. In addition to relieving depression symptoms, research also shows that maintaining an exercise schedule can prevent you from relapsing.Physical activity is a powerful depression fighter for several reasons. Most importantly, it promotes all kinds of changes in the brain, including neural growth, reduced inflammation, and new activity patterns that promote feelings of calm and well-being. It also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals in your brain that energize your spirits and make you feel good. Finally, physical activity can also serve as a distraction, allowing you to find some quiet time to break out of the cycle of negative thoughts that feed depression.

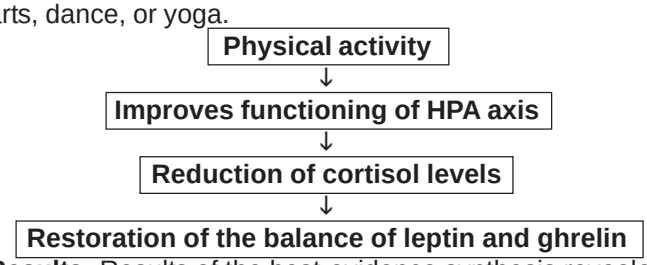
Benefits of physical activity on anxiety: Physical activity is a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. It relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins. Anything that gets you moving can help, but you'll get a bigger benefit if you pay attention instead of zoning out.Try to notice the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, for example, or the rhythm of your breathing, or the feeling of the wind on your skin. By adding this mindfulness element—really focusing on your body and how it feels as you exercise—you'll not only improve your physical condition faster, but you may also be able to interrupt the flow of constant worries running through your head.

Physical activity and alcohol dependence syndrome: Substance abuse, namely alcohol abuse, may have devastating effects on a person's mental and physical health. Tolerance and an inability to control drinking are some hallmarks of alcoholism. Research shows that physical activity is an effective supplement in the fight against alcohol use disorder. In addition to perhaps acting centrally on the neurotransmitter systems, physical exercise may mitigate the deleterious health consequences of drinking. Evidence suggests that persons with alcohol use disorder are not physically active and have low cardiorespiratory fitness. A wide number of medical comorbidities, like diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and other cardiovascular illnesses, occur with alcohol use disorders. Physical exercise may be highly useful in aiding the management of these comorbidities. Physical exercise and yoga may help in the management of cravings for substances when other forms of therapy, such as counselling or medication for craving management are not feasible or acceptable. Physical exercise has been shown to have beneficial effects on mental health, relieve stress, and provide an enjoyable replacement for the substance. However, the patient must take an active role in physical activity-based therapies rather than passively accept the process as it is, which is in stark contrast to the approach used by conventional medicine. Since most substance use patients lack motivation and commitment to change, it is recommended that physical activity-based therapies be supplemented with therapies focusing on motivation to change to maximise therapeutic outcomes.

One hundred seventeen persons with alcohol use disorder participated in a single-arm, exploratory trial that involved a 12-minute fitness test using a cycle ergometer as an intervention. Statistically, significantly fewer cravings were experienced by 40%. Exercise programmes were found to significantly reduce alcohol intake and binge drinking in people with alcohol use disorder in a meta-analysis and comprehensive review of the effects of such therapies .

Easy ways to move more that don't involve the gym: Don't have a 30-minute block of time to dedicate to yoga or a bike ride? Don't worry, there are ways to exercise without the gym. Think about physical activity as a lifestyle rather than just a single task to check off your to-do list. Look at your daily routine and consider ways to sneak in activity here, there, and everywhere.Move in and around your home. Clean the house, wash the car, tend to the yard and garden, mow the lawn with a push mower, sweep the sidewalk or patio with a broom.Sneak activity in at work or on the go. Bike or walk to an appointment rather than drive, use stairs instead of elevators, briskly walk to the bus stop then get off one stop early, park at the back of the lot and walk into the store or office, or take a vigorous walk during your coffee break.Get active with the family. Jog around the soccer field during your kid's practice, make a neighborhood bike ride part of your weekend routine, play tag with your children in the yard, go canoeing at a lake, walk the dog in a new place.Get creative with exercise ideas. Pick fruit at an orchard, boogie to music, go to the beach or

take a hike, gently stretch while watching television, organize an office bowling team, take a class in martial arts, dance, or yoga.



Results: Results of the best-evidence synthesis revealed strong evidence for 12 mediators including affect, mental health and wellbeing, self-esteem, self-efficacy, physical self-worth, body image satisfaction, resilience, social support, social connection, physical health, pain, and fatigue. Moderate evidence was identified for a further 15 mediators and eight moderators.

Conclusion: Findings should inform the design of future physical activity interventions to ensure optimal effects on mental health related outcomes. Additionally, if health professionals were to take these mediators and moderators into consideration when prescribing or recommending physical activity, physical activity would likely have a greater impact on population mental health.

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