

- Stimulants

## Exercise can be more effective than antidepressants

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The mental benefits of exercise have been drilled into our heads for years, but it turns out those suggestions do have science's tick of approval.



A new study, which reviewed more than 200 randomised trials, analysing over 14,000 people with clinical depression, found that exercise has a considerable impact on the treatment of depression. In fact, some exercise can be better for treatment than antidepressants alone.

### TREATING DEPRESSION

Depression is a mood disorder characterised by “persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest,” says the Mayo Clinic. For depression to qualify as “clinical”, the feelings need to persist for at least two weeks at a time.

Prescription antidepressants are the most common form of treatment for depression (alongside psychological intervention), which science shows can be a very effective option. That being said, it's not always the most effective one.

Seeing a specialist and filling regular prescriptions can be costly and time-consuming which, for some people, just isn't an option.

As per the study, if certain forms of exercise can be far more beneficial than taking antidepressants alone, it could have a huge impact on people's experience of depression, and how they experience treatment.

However, not every form of exercise will work. And its efficacy will depend on your age and gender.

### WHAT TYPES OF EXERCISE?

According to the report, walking, jogging, yoga and strength training are “about as effective” as cognitive behavioural therapy, and more effective than antidepressants alone.

For women, strength training is best. For men, yoga and qigong could have a more beneficial effect. Furthermore, yoga is more effective for older adults – good news given that intense cardio or resistance training are more difficult as you age – and strength training is better for younger patients. The report shows dance is also an effective method of alleviating symptoms of depression, no matter your age or your sex.

Interestingly, what isn't at all effective is stretching. It may be good for you physically, but contributes nothing to the treatment of depression.

### WHY DOES EXERCISE HELP TO TREAT DEPRESSION?

A study published by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) posits that exercise helps with self-esteem and cognitive function, along with alleviating symptoms of depression like low self-esteem and social withdrawal – particularly if you're exercising with friends.

It also satisfies another part of our psyche, in that we are learning a new skill and being exposed to new environments, stimulating the brain.

## HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED TO EXERCISE TO ALLEVIATE DEPRESSION?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests people do between 150 and 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity – 2.5 to 3 hours a week.

However, this study showed that it actually doesn't matter how much exercise you do when it comes to treating depression, as long as you do some at all. That being said, the higher the intensity of the exercise the better, and the effects are better still if you exercise with a group, rather than alone. This was the same regardless of the severity of depression.