

## 6. Exercise

There have been several studies done that support exercise in improving symptoms of depression. Possible effects of exercise include:

- Exercise may increase serotonin levels in the brain improving symptoms of depression.
- Exercise requires taking an active role in recovery leading to improved self esteem.
- Exercise can help relieve stress by burning off stress chemicals such as adrenaline.
- Exercise can stimulate the release of endorphins in our body which are a natural opioid. Endorphins have a relaxing and calming effect on the body.
- Exercise may distract us from negative thinking.

In addition to these positive effects on mood, exercising can also improve cardiovascular fitness, reduce cholesterol levels, reduce blood pressure, improve muscle tone and assist in maintaining a healthy weight.

**There is no question that regular exercise can benefit us. Then why are we so resistant to doing it?**

For most people incorporating exercise into their daily routine is a change, and change takes effort. Change can also seem particularly difficult when you're depressed. As human creatures we resist change and prefer to operate on auto-pilot. The interesting thing is that what is required to make a change is to just keep doing the new behavior over and over again until the new behavior becomes auto-pilot. So it is really the initial phase of incorporating exercise that is so difficult.

**Ways to be successful include:**

- ✓ Setting a realistic and attainable goal!! Don't attempt to make a huge change, keep it simple, fun and attainable. (10 minute walk after

dinner around the block). Think of things that you enjoy doing...if you hate to run then don't start out by setting a goal to run a mile.

**Examples:**

- Borrow a piece of exercise equipment and try it out before investing in one that you end up not liking.
- Find a friend to exercise with.
- Take a class together or plan to walk at a scheduled time every day.

Use the box below to write down 1 or more simple exercise goals, remember no goal is too small or too simple:

**Example:** "I will walk 10 minutes every other day."

<p><b><u>GOALS:</u></b></p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p>
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Next, identify barriers to following through with your goal.

**Example:** If you plan to exercise after work will you be so tired that it will be too easy for you to just go home and watch TV? Write the possible barriers in the box below.

<p><b><u>Possible Barriers to Goals:</u></b></p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p>
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Visualize yourself doing the activity and reaching your goal. Visualize how good you will feel afterward.

Think of a brief cheerleading statement.

**Example:** "Exercise is easy, it makes me feel better and keeps me healthy."  
Use the box below to write down your own motivating statement.

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**Repeat this statement to yourself often.**

- ✓ Find ways to reward yourself when you meet your goal. No, not chocolate cake but something healthy like 30 minutes of free reading uninterrupted or buying a nice pair of walking shoes.

Often something as simple as sticking a fun sticker on your calendar for the days you have meet your goal can be very motivating and rewarding.

### **So how much exercise is enough?**

Operating on the principle that anything is better than nothing can be helpful at first. Even 10 minutes 3x week is a start. Chances are that once you get going you will naturally increase to 20 minutes. As this becomes more comfortable then increase the number of days per week. Acknowledge and celebrate your progress along the way. You do not need to be doing more than 20-30 minutes 3-5x week to benefit from the exercise.

Keep a log of how many minutes you exercise each day. Each week increase your exercise to the next level that you are comfortable with.

Once you are doing this you can congratulate yourself on incorporating an exercise program into your daily routine. Now if you decide you would like to do more there are many resources we can tell you about to expand your program further.

Note: Always check with your clinician before starting any exercise routine.

## Resources

### **Individual Help**

**Exercise Consultations:** Exercise Consults are individualized appointments with an exercise physiologist designed to assist you in developing an exercise program that is targeted to treat a specific condition. The exercise physiologists use national guidelines as a basis for their prescribed exercise program. If you have cardiac or peripheral vascular disease, or modifiable cardiac risk factors, you are eligible for an exercise consultation. Medical clearance from a physician is required before you can meet with the exercise physiologist. For more information or to schedule an appointment for an exercise consultation at Preventive Cardiology at UofM, please call (734) 998-7400

### **Classes**

MFit offers a variety of exercise and relaxation classes at locations across the University of Michigan medical complex, the Ann Arbor campus and at the MFit Fitness Center-Ice Cube. MFit classes are open to all UMHS employees, U of M employees and the general public. Call MFit at (734) 975-3024 or go to their website <http://www.med.umich.edu/mfit/employee/classes.htm>

### **Disclaimer:**

This written information is not intended as a substitute for medical or mental health care advice. Please be sure to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with a professional person.