

## Your brain on exercise

Is it just me or is there something seriously screwed with the direction we're headed in as a society. There's copius amounts of information about the benefits of exercise for the treatment and prevention of depression. But WHY are so many of us suffering from serious depression?

Some stats for you:

- 1) Since 1981 there has been an 345% increase in the use of anti-depressants.
- 2) Anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication account for 13% of all drug prescriptions.
- 3) Prescription drugs are the fastest rising health care cost increasing at a rate of 16-18% per year.
- 4) According to a study out of Australia, everyone at some point in their life will be affected by depression.
- 5) In the US 9.5% of the population will suffer from a depression (depressive disorder, dysthymic disorder, and bipolar disorder) every year.
- 6) Pre-schoolers are the fastest-growing market for antidepressants. At least four percent of preschoolers -- over a million -- are clinically depressed in the US. I have to source this one because it seems almost unbelievable to me (Study published in Psychiatric Services, April 2004. Reported in our health news archive: Pill-Popping Pre-Schoolers, Even Toddlers Get the Blues).
- 7) Depression will be the second largest killer after heart disease by 2020 -- and studies show depression is a contributory factor to fatal coronary disease. ( WHO report on mental illness released October 4, 2001. Health news stories: Depression Link to Heart Disease, Hostility, Depression May Boost Heart Disease)
- 8) In the US, depression results in more absenteeism than almost any other physical disorder and costs employers more than US\$51 billion per year in absenteeism and lost productivity, not including high medical and pharmaceutical bills.

I could go on and on about shocking statistics. But really, need I say more? We have higher rates of depression than those in developing countries yet we live in more financial abundance, have access to better food and health care and are not an oppressed society. What the hell is going on? Please, share your thoughts.

So let me get to what I should be talking about because I'm not a doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist. I'm a fitness professional and I'm a woman on a mission to help people transform their bodies and I ain't got much time. And I

want to qualify anything you're about to read.

**You should be getting help from a mental health expert if you think you might be suffering from depression. Don't suffer in silence. If anything, the stats above should make you realize you're not alone and you shouldn't be ashamed.**

Let me explain how exercise can help fight and prevent depression:

- 1) Exercise raises levels of mood enhancing neurotransmitters and boosts feel good endorphins.
- 2) Exercise can improve confidence. Losing weight and feeling better about our bodies can give us more courage to meet other people and to take risks to improve our lives.
- 3) We often sleep better after exercising as long as it's not too close to bed time.
- 4) Exercise increases body temperature which has a calming effect.
- 5) Tackling a new activity or doing something we know is good for us increases confidence.
- 6) Being involved in physical activity can be a distraction from worries or troubles.
- 7) Exercising with other people around gets us out of isolation and provides opportunities for human interaction.
- 8) Higher levels of physical activity is correlated with better brain aging and may even prevent the onset of Alzheimers.
- 9) Physical activity improves concentration and attention.
- 10) Physical activity can replace unhealthy coping mechanisms. Instead of drinking, eating crappy food or falling back on old coping mechanisms, exercise can become a new coping strategy over time.

So if you're ready this and you're thinking, "When I'm depressed I just want to stay in bed. I don't feel like I can even get to work, make dinner or get out the door, period". I get it. The last thing I want to be seen as is one of those annoying fitness freaks that preaches and condescends. I'm am truly a fitness expert for the people. Here are some suggestions that might help you take the leap towards exercise:

- 1) Even 10-15 minutes of physical activity can improve your mood in the short term.

BUT

- 2) 30 minutes per day 3-5 times per day would freakin' rock if you can do it.
- 3) Keep your definition of exercise broad: walking to the store quickly, riding your bike, going out dancing sans alcohol of course, taking any type of class that involves physical activity. Get it out of your head that the only type of exercise you count is something you do at a gym.
- 4) Be realistic. I've had several clients who suffer from depression who are in an up phase and decide to exercise 5 days per week out of the gate and then hit a dip and I don't see them for a while. Bite off a little at a time so you don't feel like you've failed yourself in any way.
- 5) Pick something you think is fun. Yes exercise can be fun for everyone ;)
- 6) Write down what's stopping you from exercising and then write BUT.... For example, I want to exercise but I already feel so overwhelmed by everything on my plate BUT I truly believe I'm going to feel better if I just make myself.
- 7) Get the support of your doctor, mental health care provider or therapist.

In my heart of hearts I don't want people to suffer more than they have to. And I truly believe as sure as there is a freakin' sun in the sky, that exercising more regularly is one of the best things we can do to tackle depression.

Compassionately yours,

Jane  
[www.urbanfitt.com](http://www.urbanfitt.com)