

# Managing depression with exercise



## What this fact sheet covers:

- Helpful strategies to motivate you to become more active
- Where to get help

Feeling tired and less motivated are two very common symptoms of depression. This means that exercise is often the last thing that people feel like doing when they are feeling depressed. The following strategies can help motivate to gradually become more active:

## Make a plan

- Start slowly and build up gradually e.g. if you have not been exercising at all, start with a 10-15 minute walk each morning, and gradually increase this to 30 minutes per day.
- Set short-term realistic goals for exercising each week (e.g. 3 x 20 minute walks per week); plan to exercise at specific times of the day that fit in with your lifestyle and write your plan down.
- A range of health professionals can assist with increasing your activity level (see the 'Where to get help' section in this fact sheet).

## Keep Motivated

- Keep an activity diary to document your daily exercise.
- A pedometer can be helpful in keeping track of your activity levels.
- Reward yourself when you achieve your short-term exercise goals.

## Keep it up

- You don't have to join a gym – try a variety of different types of activities to find those that you enjoy (e.g. swimming, walking the dog, jogging, riding a bike, gardening, bushwalking, yoga, weight-lifting).
- Give yourself a break – if you don't stick to your exercise plan, simply start again from where you left off.
- Remember that it can take time for the benefits of exercise to occur. Most exercise studies have shown a significant reduction in depression after eight weeks or more.
- Get other people involved – ask a friend, partner or relative to join you. Although it is common to not feel like socialising when experiencing depression, it can be helpful to include others in exercise, to gain support and help with motivation.
- Write down the specific benefits that you would like to gain from exercise, and refer back to these to help with motivation (e.g. to reduce stress, improve mood, get in shape and improve sleep).
- Write down the situations you expect would make it difficult to exercise, and develop a plan to address them. For example, if it rains, go for a walk in a shopping centre; if you feel too tired for a full exercise session, go for a 10 minute walk).



## Where to get help

If you are new to exercise, pregnant, a smoker, overweight, have heart disease or major health problems, it is recommended that you seek medical advice before commencing a vigorous exercise program. The following health professionals can assist in this process:

- **Exercise Physiologists** are university qualified allied health professionals who specialise in the delivery of exercise, lifestyle and behavioural programs for the prevention and management of chronic conditions (including depression) and injuries. People who have ongoing health conditions (e.g. depression) are able to receive Medicare rebates for up to five sessions with an exercise physiologist. For more information on exercise physiologists (and to find an exercise physiologist in your area), visit [www.aess.com.au](http://www.aess.com.au) or visit [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au) to find out more about the available Medicare rebates.
- **General Practitioners (GPs)** may be able to provide advice and information about depression and exercise, and can provide a referral to a qualified exercise physiologist under Medicare.
- **Psychologists and Clinical Psychologists** can assist with increasing motivation to exercise, activity scheduling and problem-solving to overcome barriers to exercise.

Organisations that provide facilities and services for exercise include: council recreation centres, gymnasiums and sports clubs and community health centres.

## Contact Us

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