

Did You Know?

Depression, Energy, and Exercise

Depression is a leading cause of disability and a major contributor to disease burden worldwide.

Systematic reviews have consistently shown **exercise** to significantly reduce symptoms of depression.

Physical movement **creates energy** which is needed to function mentally and physically.

Depression can be debilitating. Depression impacts everything. How we eat, how we sleep, how we function, how we care for ourselves, *if* we care for ourselves. Depression tends to make us want to isolate as it takes energy to converse or 'put on a happy face' for the sake of others. During this time of a worldwide pandemic which also isolates, it's a double whammy for those living with depression. It's common to get into a pattern of nothingness, of watching TV to distract our minds from whatever is depressing us and putting off the important things until 'tomorrow'. As many of us know from experience, 'tomorrow' can be even *more* depressing because there's so many things to do from yesterday! Feeding the cycle of nothingness comes a lack of physical energy to do anything. I struggle with my own journey with depression. Ironically, procrastination and avoidance of doing things actually feeds my depressive symptoms. A disorganized, and cluttered surrounding feeds my disorganized and cluttered mind and drives me to the couch! I just gave away a sofa that had a nicely formed Netflix dip in the middle. Ready for the next depressed person!

Joking aside, I recognize what stops me in my tracks and by doing *something* I start to gain more control over the depression that wants me to stop living.

What might stop you in your tracks? Symptoms of depression may include:

- having trouble concentrating
- having trouble remembering things or even making decisions
- fatigue and lack of energy
- feelings of hopelessness or negativity
- feelings of worthlessness and helplessness
- if you find yourself sleeping too much, or difficulty sleeping at night, restlessness and irritability, you may be depressed
- loss of interest in things you once enjoyed is also common, as is persistent sadness, anxious, maybe crying often and sometimes for no apparent reason
- lastly and most importantly are suicidal thoughts and attempts

The one constant thing I've always done in my life and remain to do to help manage depression is exercise.

'How can I exercise if I don't have the energy or desire to do anything?!' Listen, there's days I don't exercise and what I've learned is to not beat myself up about it. But those are just days, not a lifestyle of no physical activity or exercise. The hardest step is the first one. Literally and figuratively speaking. When

you choose to go outside for a walk, or some other type of physical activity like working in the garden, that's YOU taking control over your depression. Sometimes it's just not enough to read an article and start walking. If you're anything like me the 'experience' of feeling the difference exercise makes is what keeps me choosing to exercise.

Energy is needed for everything we do, even the smallest of things. Seems the less we do the less energy we have, not more. Depression is not a 'rest stop' is it? How does the body make energy then? Dr. Cathy Maxwell, an Aging and Frailty Researcher, describes it as our 'energy engines', the part of the cell that makes mitochondria, or energy. As we age, we start to lose physical strength and endurance from less production of our energy engines. Our 'used' energy engines are removed from the body over time and we can make new ones, at whatever age! The way we make new energy engines is to create a demand for them. The demand is physical activity and movement. The added energy zapper of depression makes it harder to find the motivation to move. Perhaps we should 'move anyway'. Sometimes when I'm feeling down and have little energy, I put on my running shoes and head to the front door. IF I make it to the front door I head outside and just start walking. As I start walking, I begin to feel a little more energy and my desire to keep going increases and soon I find I'm running. Choose whatever kind of physical activity that you enjoy, and it may not feel like a chore.

**The more we move the more demand we are creating
and the more energy engines our body makes as a result!**

We know from research and systematic reviews that regular exercise significantly reduces depressive symptoms for individuals with depression. As a matter of fact, in light of such evidence, depression is the only mental health disorder in which exercise is recommended as an evidence-based treatment in clinical guidelines. Exercise recommendations for those living with depression is based on the best available evidence acknowledging that personal fitness and current and past activity levels also be considered. Check with your physician if you haven't exercised before. Consider regular exercise spread throughout the week up to at least 150 minutes a week, if not more, of aerobic activity like walking or cycling. Moderate-level intensity such as walking at a pace you can talk but not belt out a show tune is a good guide! Start out slow however maybe 2-3 days a week and work up to 3-5 days a week of 150 minutes or more a week. Exercising *regularly* will help lift your mood *regularly*. Regular exercise may improve your ability to concentrate, provide the mental energy for motivation, better sleep, and God forbid you might even find yourself giggling over something silly! I know what living with depression is like. I know you do too. I also know that physical activity, movement, exercise brings immediate and long-term improvements in mood and better handling of daily living. It will for you too. MyFitScript has a FREE muscle strengthening exercise program that you can do inside, or a walking program you can do outside. Depression can be debilitating, as we said in the start of this article. However, it doesn't have to be.



**No one can make you do anything you don't want to do.
So, don't let your depression tell you what to do.**

For free exercise programs visit www.myfitscript.com