Build Activity Into Your Everyday Life

To Combat Low Mood

How has low mood affected your physical activity levels, and your ability to do the things you really enjoyed? Have you found that over time you have become more and more tired, the fatigue making it seem impossible to will yourself to be any more active than you are?

Maybe your medication has made you put on weight, making you feel self-conscious about exercising. The thought of having to socialise or visit new and public places to exercise may make you anxious, agitated and unable to control the environment. Or maybe you are simply just not interested in being more active.

These are all normal and real concerns, even barriers to being more active when suffering from low mood. Becoming more active – from whatever baseline – is the most important treatment for persistent fatigue as it helps with body conditioning and boosts energy levels. It can be a way to take back control of your body. Being active is an important adjunct to managing low mood. Activity won't cure you but it will help with recovery. Being active can be as important as taking medication in cases of mild to moderate low mood.

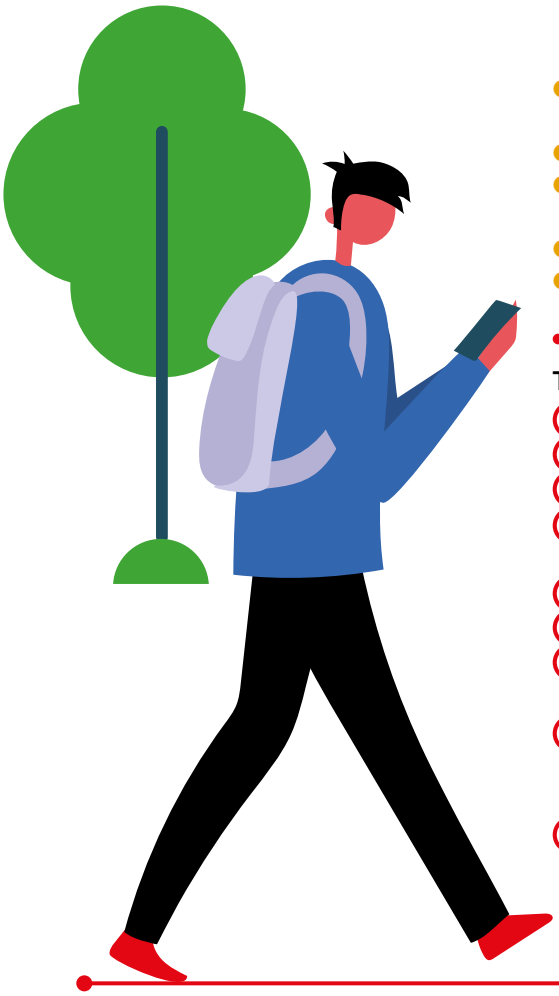


The benefits you will feel from being more active are:

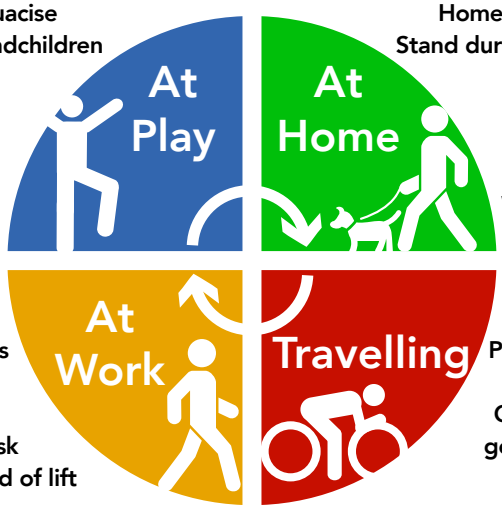
1. **Improved sleep:** Poor sleep patterns are a vicious cycle, leading to fatigue and decreased energy levels and less motivation resulting in less activity. This leads to social isolation and poor daily routine, which all feeds back into poor sleep. Being more physically active helps you become more sociable, gives you better energy levels, less fatigue and better motivation, all of which lead to a better daily routine and improved sleep.
2. **Improved self-confidence:** Improvement may be a result of the combination of improved sleep, healthy weight maintenance and controlled appetite. Physical activity helps you feel better about your body and your physical capabilities which all lead to an improved sense of self-esteem and self-worth.
3. **Improved mood:** The antidepressant effects of exercise have been well-studied and show significant improvements in mild and also more severe states of low mood. Mood may be improved by activity because of the release of endorphins, happy hormones, but also through increased motivation and socialising, as well as decreased anxiety – essentially improving your quality of life.
4. **Reduced social isolation:** Getting out and about to be physically active will help you feel less socially isolated. Even just a nod and a smile can make us feel better in ourselves.
5. **Less tiredness and improved energy levels:** The more you do, the more energy you will have and the less tired you will be. This may sound crazy when the thought of doing any activity makes you exhausted and, yes, the first week or so may be a little challenging, but as your body adapts and more endorphins are released (such as serotonin a happy, feel-good hormone), you will start to feel the change.
6. **Reduced stress levels:** Exercise can improve physiological stress responses and reduce the levels of cortisol. High levels of cortisol, a stress hormone, can hurt you more than it helps. Over time, high levels may cause weight gain and high blood pressure, disrupt sleep, negatively impact mood, reduce your energy levels and even contribute to diabetes. Even a single exercise session can improve mood, reduce stress and improve energy levels.
7. **Improved motivation:** Being able to regain some control of your life, by following an exercise plan, will improve your motivation which in turn will help motivate you to make other changes in your life, such as to eat more healthily.
8. **Moderated appetite:** Low mood can cause increased or decreased appetite. Exercise can help regulate and 'normalise' hormones that may be affecting your appetite and weight gain or loss. Being more active burns more calories and can contribute to weight loss, which in turn may aid your sense of self-worth, giving you confidence to do more. We are not promoting excessive weight loss, but rather advocating the benefits of being active, having a healthy, balanced diet and respect for your body and reaping the rewards of taking control of your condition. It will also help you reduce your risk of suffering from other illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
9. **Improved cognition:** Being physically inactive can lead to poor sleep and poor concentration, increased agitation and frustration as well as feelings of self-worthlessness. All of this can affect your ability to work, study, contribute at home or in your community. A sedentary lifestyle promotes cognitive decline and early onset dementia. Improvements in cognitive function and memory have been shown with increased levels of physical activity.
10. **Reduced need for medication in low mood**.

Making Everyday Life More Active

Studies have shown that moderate physical activity, even as little as 15 minutes 3 times a week, can be effective in the prevention and treatment of low mood. That's not to say we are accepting this and disregarding the guidelines which recommend more weekly activity for optimal health benefits. But it does show that whatever you do, whatever you can cope with, is better than doing nothing.



Apart from formal exercise or group activities, you can build activity into your everyday life. Small changes will ultimately make big differences to your quality of life. Ideas for making everyday life more active include:



- **Swimming or aquacise**
- **Playing with grandchildren**
- **Singing**
- **Walking club**
- **Exercise class**
- **Pilates, yoga, Tai chi**

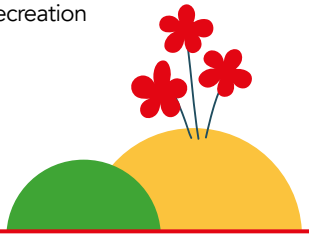
- **Home-based exercises**
- **Stand during advert break**
- **Walking**
- **Singing**
- **Gardening**
- **Housework**
- **Walking the dog**

- **Take active breaks**
- **Walking meetings**
- **Stand when on the telephone**
- **Stand at your desk**
- **Take stairs instead of lift**

- **Cycling**
- **Walk**
- **Park further away in the car park**
- **On public transport get off a stop earlier and walk**

These tips can help you be more active everyday:

1. Start with small 10-minute bursts of activities.
2. Be more active on the good days.
3. Every little bit helps and accumulates over time.
4. You will soon be able to do more, increasing the duration (length of time) of the activity and later on the intensity (the amount of effort or exertion you feel).
5. Incorporate activity into your daily routine.
6. Choose activities, sports or exercise classes that you enjoy.
7. Do exercise with a friend – the company is always fun and may help you stay motivated by having to meet someone daily.
8. Do the activity in an environment that makes you feel safe, you don't have to be in public or join a gym, you could use a local park or recreation centre or do activities at home.
9. Accept that relapse is ok and it is ok to start again.



The Last Word

A good idea before starting an activity is to sit down with your therapist or even a family member or friend and write down what it is you want to achieve. Set goals, easy achievable ones initially. These will help build self-esteem and confidence. Then you can start looking from short-term easier goals (which may be as simple as walking 10 minutes every day, or achieving a walk around the block 3 times a week) to middle- and long-term ones, extending over the coming months and year.

'Action planning' is the next step. Write down what you are going to do each day or as a weekly plan. Keeping these plans, together with a daily diary, will help you stay motivated and see the improvements over time. You can use self-monitoring devices like pedometers, wrist-worn activity trackers or smartphones to keep track of your daily step count. There are also many activity apps that can be downloaded to mobile phones to help you monitor your activity levels, motivate you or provide you with daily exercise routines. Get help and advice from your physical therapist about what would best suit you and your condition.

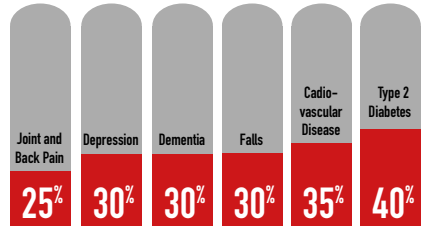
Make sure you have support – be it family and friends or a physical therapist, support group or exercise programme. The right support will be invaluable in keeping you motivated and encouraged, particularly on those bad days, and make you accountable for changing your life!

Gold Standard Exercise Recommendations for Health

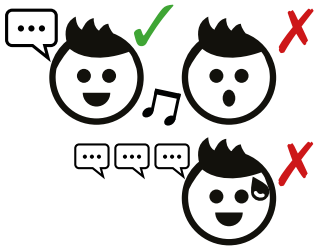
If Exercise Was A Pill

Reduce your risk by being more active. Staying physically active reduces your chances of suffering from:





What is Moderate Intensity Versus Vigorous Intensity Activity?



On a scale of 0–10

Moderate intensity = 5 or 6
think "Can talk, but not sing"

Vigorous intensity = 7 or 8
think "Difficulty talking without pausing"

What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Aged 5–17?

- 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity – every day
- >60 minutes daily will give even better health benefits
- Most of the daily physical activity should be aerobic
- But should incorporate vigorous-intensity activities that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 times per week



What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Aged 18–64?

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week.



What Activity Should I Be Doing If I'm Over 65 Years of Age?

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes
- 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 150 of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity brings even greater health benefits
- Activities that enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week
- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups, on 2 or more days a week
- The goal is to be as physically active as your abilities and conditions allow.



Reference: Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, World Health Organisation 2018

How Activity Intensity Reduces Your Risk of Dying



Reference: Domains of physical activity and all-cause mortality: systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of cohort studies. International Journal of Epidemiology 2011

First Steps to Being More Active



TIP If you are starting out try breaking your daily goal into shorter bouts of 10 minutes at a time



Gradually increase the exercise intensity



Join friends to make it more enjoyable



Pick activities you find fun and mix them up



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