

Physical Activity and Depression

By Charlotte Hale and Professor Adrian Taylor

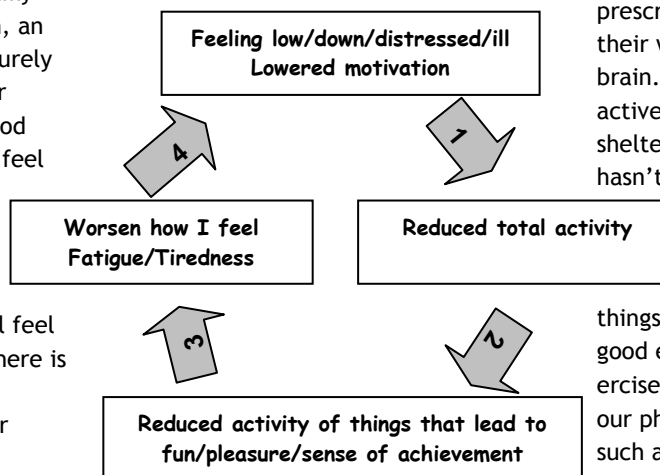
Most of us are aware that taking some form of regular exercise is good for our general well-being – both physically and mentally. A good gym session, an energetic exercise class, or a leisurely stroll along a countryside path for many would increase improve mood and leave us with a sense of ‘the feel good factor’. The exact form and amount of exercise, or more generally termed in research ‘Physical Activity’ differs for each individual (not everyone will feel fantastic after a 10km run) and there is something to be said for personal choice. General fitness levels, our perceived competence, the environment, social opportunities and preference for activities, are major features in whether physical activity provides a positive experience for each individual.

The term ‘Physical Activity’ need not imply exercise or sport in the traditional sense. Research has shown that any form of physical activity may potentially improve mood, depending upon the value attributed to the activity by the individual. There are many ways to integrate activity into our lives, be it exercising in front of the TV whilst listening to that new album on our iPod, or simply walking home from work instead of taking the bus. Current research suggests that by integrating 30 to 40 minutes of physical activity into their our daily lives 3 or 4 times a week, we can improve our mood, increase our self-esteem and lower stress levels.

For those with depression, physical activity can be successfully adopted as a self-help strategy (coping mechanism) to help alleviate feelings of low mood, self-esteem, energy and motivation. Current research in the area of physical activity as a treatment for depression is somewhat based around a spiral model concept (fig.1).

Patients with clinically diagnosed mild to moderate depression involved in an on-going Department of Health funded current study (TREAD; TRial of Exercise And Depression) based at the

Figure 1. Spiral model of reduced activity in depression



Universities of Bristol and Exeter are typically able to identify with the above model (fig.1). Patients report that feelings of low mood are accompanied by low motivation which reduces their total their activity throughout the day. This leads to less sense of achievement and worsened feelings of fatigue, low energy and tiredness; which commonly results in feelings of isolation and lowered mood, thus creating a downward spiral which can be difficult to break-through. Researchers believe that by interrupting the cycle at point 1 (by increasing levels of physical activity) individuals are able to take an upward path through the model experiencing a greater sense of achievement, higher self-esteem, intensified energy levels and ultimately uplifting mood and alleviating common symptoms of depression. Such is the size of the study, the results are not expected to be available until 2010/11 but if successful, the promotion of PA on the NHS for the treatment of depression could become more common practice.

So how does exercise affect how we feel? Apart from changing the way we feel about ourselves, providing opportunities to mix with others, and exert personal control over the choices we have in being physically active, there is increasing evidence that physical activity produces chemical changes in the brain associated with feeling better. A study by Hunsberger and colleagues in 2007,

reported in *Nature Medicine*, suggested that exercise may have greater anti-depressant effects than any currently prescribed anti-depressant, based on their work on neurotransmitters in the brain. Since humans were designed to be active to fulfill basic needs (food, water, shelter) the brain chemistry probably hasn't changed much and by increasingly sitting around being inactive we are less likely to feel at our best.

We also often feel anxious about things when depressed. Again, there is good evidence that a single session of exercise can reduce anxiety and minimize our physiological responses to stress, such as increased blood pressure. Several short bouts of activity (e.g. a 10–15 minute brisk walk) each day can make us feel calmer and energized to face the day's challenges. Being active also takes our mind off things and may stop us from ruminating about negative things.

There is a general perception that exercise is going to make us feel tired and when we feel down we may turn to stimulants such as coffee and high energy snacks such as chocolate to keep us going. While these may provide instant energy, later we may actually feel more tired. In contrast, Robert Thayer, in a book called '*Calm Energy: How people regulate mood with food and exercise*,' suggested that exercise may have more lasting energizing properties. Even short periods of easily-achieved physical activity tends to increase calm rather than tense energy. Driving the car short distances or resting in front of the TV are unlikely to energise us. Prolonged periods of being inactive also doesn't help us to sleep.

In summary, our recommendation would be to try to achieve the minimum recommended amount of physical activity for physical and health benefits, proposed by experts from around the world: that is to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (at a level you can still talk at but feel your heart is beating faster) on at least 5 days a week. That could be three 10-minute brisk walks a day or one longer session. If you can feel or become more →

Which Channel Do You Prefer?

A Healer's View

Gavin Wilshaw

Many of us live our lives as though we are tuned in to a particular TV channel.

There are channels which specialise in broadcasting comedy programmes, or sports, or 24-hour news, or history for example, and whatever type of material appears on any one channel, that characteristic content will keep coming round on that channel.

In our lives we sometimes find ourselves stuck in a sequence of negative events: we find fault and grumble, we judge others and ourselves harshly, we fall out with relatives or friends, the car breaks down and needs an expensive repair, the central heating boiler develops a fault necessitating more expensive work; we are down on our luck. All this weighs down upon us and we become depressed and possibly reclusive.

Whilst all this is going on we notice a neighbour who is always smiling and is obviously happy. This person is popular in the neighbourhood and likes to be available to help others. They are by no

<—competent in what you do, enjoy the experience (perhaps with music or with someone else) and varying what you do it should at least get you mind off things and help you enjoy better physical health. But we would predict that it will make you feel better, which may also influence some of the other less healthy aspects of your lifestyle.

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means well off, living in a modest home, but good things always seem to come their way; they are lucky. They enjoy good health and look young for their age.

It is obvious there is a fundamental dissimilarity in these two lives; we can say that, by analogy, they are attuned to different life channels.

TV channels are conveyed on different broadcasting frequencies, so when we change channels we are changing frequencies and therefore a different selection of programmes becomes available to us. It seems more than likely the first individual would like to change life channels and this means changing the frequency of their personal vibration.

The first person can be summed up as being attuned to the vibration or frequency of fear and contraction, the second to the frequency of love and expansion.

When we have a fearful thought we tend to contract; on our face the contraction shows as a frown or scowl. If we are made to feel vulnerable we fold our arms or cover our solar plexus with a hand—just observe people in a conflict situation defending their position, arms folded, corporeally contracted.

Conversely, when we are expressing love, friendship, warmth and affection our body language is expansive; our face broadens into a smile, arms open wide, and we move forward in order to embrace the other person.

In life the fear channel has everything on it that relates to the frequency of its vibration. Once you tune in to it by your negative thoughts and actions you open

yourself up to its assortment of unpleasant negative 'programmes'.

However, the channel which resonates to the energy of love has all the good things that relate to its particular vibrational frequency.

If you have a stringed instrument at home you may have noticed it start to resonate in sympathy with a note of music that comes from your music system. This sympathetic resonance is the principle underlying the switching of life channels, except this time it's working at a different level.

Therefore to change from the fear channel to the love channel simply start to act out of character; every time you have a fear-based negative thought replace it with its love-based positive counterpart. For example, you may feel like having a good moan about a friend whom you perceive has treated you badly, but then on consideration realise that something you'd said probably created the situation. You decide to give them the benefit of the doubt and praise them for their good points.

This will start to alter the frequency of your personal vibration and the conditions and events of your life can then start to originate from a more desirable vibrational level, by means of the aforementioned sympathetic resonance.

It will require effort initially but when you reach a critical tipping point, where most of your thoughts and actions are positive, the last remaining negative effects will dissolve effortlessly. It will be worth the effort and you should gain valuable insights which you can utilise to keep yourself tuned in to your preferred life channel.

Good Luck!

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