

## Staying safe continued

If you get any of the following problems, stop exercising and get medical advice from your GP or by contacting NHS Direct (see below):

- Discomfort in your chest or upper body brought on by physical activity
- Uncomfortable or severe breathlessness during your activity
- Dizziness or nausea on exertion
- Fainting during or just after doing physical activity
- Palpitations (a very fast or irregular heart beat) during activity.

Remember: The more active you are, the more benefits you will get.

# Be active - be safe - have fun!

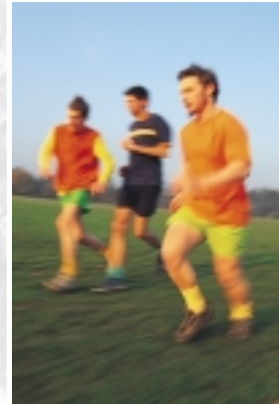
## For more information

- Depression Alliance 020 7633 9929 and [www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)
- BBC Online Health [www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/depression.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/depression.shtml)
- NHS Direct 0845 4647 or [www.nhsdirect.co.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.co.uk)
- SportEX Health - information on physical activity [www.sportex.net](http://www.sportex.net)

## Local information

# MENTAL HEALTH

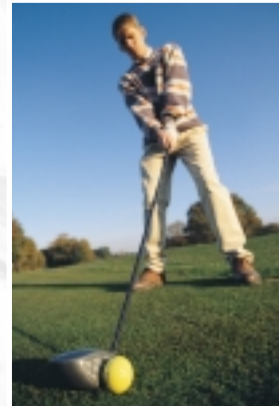
## WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?



Good mental health is a positive sense of well-being and the ability to cope with the pressure of life. It is about being able to enjoy life to the full and to have self-esteem and respect for yourself and others. As with other areas of our health, things can go wrong and there are a range of mental illnesses including depression and anxiety. Physical activity is an important treatment in itself or it can play an equally important part in complementing other treatments to promote positive mental health.

## GENERAL ADVICE

- Many areas of our lifestyle affect our mental health. Following sensible guidelines about alcohol intake, smoking, diet and physical activity can all help.
- Invest in your own mental health by maintaining friendships and hobbies that help you meet people and stay socially active.
- Learn stress control techniques and be aware of your own moods.
- If you think you have a mental health problem ask for help. You are not alone. Most people feel depressed and anxious at some point in their lives. Your GP may be able to help.



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# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

## How does physical activity encourage positive mental health?

- Research shows that being physically active encourages mental health.
- Physical activity can give you a sense of achievement, improve your self-esteem and help you to meet people.
- There is research to suggest that exercise has a positive effect on certain biochemicals that affect our mood and how we feel and exercise can sometimes be as effective as medication in treating anxiety or depression.
- It also gives you a good opportunity to meet people.
- Physical activity also helps improve your overall health by reducing important factors in heart disease such as high blood cholesterol levels, high blood pressure and the risk of having a stroke.
- Physical activity, along with a healthy diet, helps reduce stress and improves your overall feeling of well-being and quality of life, and helps you to sleep well.
- It also reduces the risk of bowel cancer, osteoporosis and the risk of falling.

## What type of activity is best?

While stamina-based activity is particularly important for health, you also need to include some strength and flexibility-based activity to get the best health gains.

**Stamina-type activities:** Walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, tennis and housework (washing floors or windows)

**Strength-type activities:** Walking uphill, carrying shopping, climbing stairs, gardening (digging or mowing) and housework

**Flexibility-type activities:** Dancing, yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi and gardening

### Tips on increasing your activity level

- Walking is an ideal activity as it's free and easy to do anywhere. Perhaps take a dog for a walk to make it more interesting.
- Look for opportunities to be active during your whole day. For example park at the far end of the car park, or walk one stop further to catch the bus, and take 10 minutes out of your lunch break to go for a walk.
- Try using the stairs instead of the escalator. If you do use the escalator start by walking part of the way up and gradually progress to walking up the whole way.
- Choose activities that you enjoy doing. Involve your friends and family to make your activities fun, sociable and enjoyable, this way you are likely to be more successful at making physical activity a regular part of your lifestyle.

## How much and how often?

**Frequency** Your main aim is to build up to 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days of the week. If this seems too much to start with, try starting with 3 x 10 minute walks spread throughout the day and work towards 2 x 15 minute walks and then 30 continuous minutes. One goal is to try and increase your activity by 2 minutes each day.

**Intensity** Moderate intensity means breathing harder and getting warmer than normal. It does not need to be hard. You should be able to talk and be active at the same time.

**Advice** Whatever your chosen activity, it should be performed at a gentle intensity which gradually increases until after about 10 minutes you have reached the level you can maintain for your chosen period of activity. This gets the blood flowing to your muscles and allows your heart rate to increase gradually. When you are nearing the end of your activity you should also slowly decrease the level of activity over 5-10 minutes to allow your heart rate to slow down gradually.

**Remember** Set yourself realistic goals and don't worry if you miss one day. Just make sure that the next day you pick up where you left off.

## Staying safe and keeping active

- Be sensible and do not walk in poorly lit and quiet areas. Wear reflective clothes after dark and be careful of traffic.
- Wear supportive footwear (they do not have to be trainers) and wear loose-fitting, comfortable clothes (it does not have to be a tracksuit).
- It is important that you set yourself realistic and achievable goals for example starting with three 10 minute walks a day and building towards 30 full minutes each day.
- If you are taking medication then it is important that you speak to a health professional about whether this will affect you when you exercise and if so, how.
- The important thing is to enjoy your activity, don't let anyone else tell you what you should be doing, pick the activities you like most.
- Try and set yourself realistic goals and keep a note in your diary of how often you exercise and for how long. Reward yourself when you do well or achieve certain goals for example for exercising a certain number of times per week.
- Focus on the positives and remind yourself about all the benefits you can experience.