

tips for enjoying activity

- > Choose something you enjoy. You may like to try a number of different kinds of activities or just stick to one.
- > Choose activities that suit you. You may prefer to exercise alone, or you might like to combine exercise with spending time with friends, family, whanau or co-workers. Being active with others not only enhances mental health but it can help keep you motivated too.
- > Remember to drink water. Hydration is important, especially if you are taking psychiatric medications.
- > Set some short and long-term goals, but make them realistic. You may want to write down some comments after you've been active to see how you've progressed in a couple of months time.
- > Don't beat up on yourself – if you miss a day it's not the end of the world. There will always be a chance to try again.
- > Don't let cost be a barrier. You don't have to go to an upmarket gym or wear designer gear. Being out in the fresh air is free and nature can lift the spirits. Outdoor light can improve mood, especially during the winter months.
- > Create a positive environment. For example, you might like to work out at home to your favourite music, or read a novel while you exercise.
- > Consult your GP if you are unsure about how active to be or if you experience any unexplained pain, dizziness or shortage of breath during activity, particularly if you are taking medication or have any physical problems (e.g. heart, blood pressure, arthritis) that could be affected by physical activity. GPs and practice nurses are increasingly giving 'Green' Prescriptions to increase activity and support lifestyle change.

Do what you can and enjoy what you do!



Push Play is a nationwide SPARC campaign to get more people more active more often. The campaign aims to increase awareness about the benefits of regular, moderate, physical activity – and how easy it is to get active.

Call 0800 ACTIVE (0800 22 84 83) or visit www.pushplay.org.nz to find out more.

**“Just this much
physical activity
could add life to your years.”**



being active when you live with mental illness



www.mentalhealth.org.nz

Working to improve the mental health of all people
and communities in New Zealand Aotearoa

The health benefits of physical activity are widely promoted. Researchers have found that at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week can have mental health benefits, particularly for depression and anxiety. Physical activity is also extremely good for reducing stress.

Physical activity is effective in the treatment of clinical depression and can be as successful as psychotherapy or medication, particularly in the longer term. It may also help people with generalised anxiety disorder, phobias, panic attacks and stress disorders, and can have a positive effect on psychological well-being in people with schizophrenia.

While there is a need for further research, being physically active also appears to play a preventive role in depression and anxiety. Meanwhile there is little doubt that regular activity can enhance the quality of life of most people living with a mental illness.



the benefits of being active

There are three ways that mental health can potentially be improved through physical activity:

- Biochemical - mood enhancing chemicals are released into the bloodstream during and after activity.
- Physiological - physical activity improves muscle and heart function, increases blood flow to the brain and increases the efficiency of brain chemicals. It can also promote better sleep.
- Psychological and social - physical activity can:
 - improve self-esteem
 - give a sense of mastery and control over life
 - promote a sense of positive achievement
 - help with weight control (weight gain is sometimes a side effect of medications)
 - provide opportunities for increased social support and social interaction.



what sort of physical activity?

Most studies so far have focused on activities such as brisk walking, jogging, aerobics or individual and team sports. For example, depression studies found that aerobic activity such as brisk walking, running and cycling or resistance activity (lifting weights in a gym) seemed to provide the greatest benefit.

No one form of physical activity rates higher than any other - that's good news as it means plenty of choice, for example:

- walking
- jogging
- swimming
- tennis
- dancing
- yoga
- going to the gym
- aerobics
- weight training
- playing team sports.

As yet there is little systematic study of a relationship between the energy we use for activities like housework, gardening, walking to the shops, or playing with the kids, and improvements in mental health. It seems logical that any activity that involves effortful physical movement, improves strength or extends your range of movement will be beneficial.

how much physical activity?

At least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week is the recommended amount for adults. And the good news is, you don't have to do it all at once. Activity can be built up throughout the day. For example, three short sessions of brisk walking are as good as one long walk. Don't overdo it. Moderate intensity physical activity is better than punishing routines. There are dangers in over-exercising, particularly for people with eating or body image problems. Your goal after being active should be to feel pleasantly tired.

**“Snack on physical activity...
feast on the benefits.”**