Aerobic Exercise May Help Treat Symptoms of Schizophrenia

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It's well documented that daily exercise can help prevent the onset of several mental illnesses, including depression, insomnia and anxiety. Now, new research findings recently published in the journal Schizophrenia Bulletin suggest that aerobic physical activity may also help treat several symptoms of schizophrenia, without unpleasant drug therapy side effects, Medical News Today reports.

Schizophrenia is a mental illness that affects an estimated 1.1 percent of American adults. It can cause hallucinations, delusions, problems with memory and abnormal thought processes.

For the study, researchers at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom conducted a review of 10 controlled trials involving 385 individuals with schizophrenia. The assessment revealed that patients who completed about 12 weeks of aerobic exercise, such as walking, swimming and cycling, alongside their normal treatment for schizophrenia had better cognitive functioning than those who didn't work out.

Specifically, aerobic exercise significantly improved attention, social cognition (the ability to read and understand social cues) and working memory in participants living with the mental illness. The study also showed that the more exercise they engaged in, the better their cognitive function became.

"We are searching for new ways to treat these aspects of illness, and now research is increasingly suggesting that physical exercise can provide a solution," said Joseph Firth, PhD, of the Institute of Brain, Behavior and Mental Health at the University of Manchester. Firth added, "Using exercise from the earliest stages of the illness could reduce the likelihood of long-term disability and facilitate full, functional recovery for patients."

To learn more about how exercise can help improve mental health, click here.

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