Is Exercise the Magic Bullet for Depression and Anxiety?

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Exercise should be prescribed more frequently for depression and anxiety, according to a press release issued by the Anxiety Research and Treatment Program at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas. Backing up that claim are two researchers--Jasper Smits, PhD, from SMU, and Michael Otto, PhD, from Boston University. Smits and Otto conducted a meta-analysis (e.g. crunching the combined data from multiple studies) and found that exercise wards off depression and anxiety in people who aren't currently depressed or anxious, and eases depression and anxiety in people who are.

"The traditional treatments of cognitive behavioral therapy and pharmacotherapy don't reach everyone who needs them, says Smits. "Exercise can fill the gap for people who can't receive traditional therapies because of cost or lack of access, or who don't want to because of the perceived social stigma associated with these treatments. Exercise also can supplement traditional treatments, helping patients become more focused and engaged."

Okay fine, I say, but it's soooooooo hard. Actually, I've had fairly long stretches in my life where I

did exercise regularly. These even sometimes became a little excessive when I was on the manic end of the spectrum. When life's gotten really busy, or my depression too potent, exercise has unfortunately gone out the window. I think I'm like most people in that regards.

Smits has a prescription for people like me (and probably you too):

"Rather than emphasize the long-term health benefits of an exercise program -- which can be difficult to sustain -- we urge providers to focus with their patients on the immediate benefits," he says. "After just 25 minutes, your mood improves, you are less stressed, you have more energy -- and you'll be motivated to exercise again tomorrow. A bad mood is no longer a barrier to exercise; it is the very reason to exercise."

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