

Walking back to happiness

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A unique exercise programme which has been proven to help women living with depression has been unveiled by researchers from The University of Nottingham.

The programme is a result of a two year-long study in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Physiotherapy. Its mission has been to help women who are living with [depression](#), characterised by low levels of [physical activity](#), increasing health and weight problems, low self-esteem and a lack of [motivation](#).

Previous research by the team had found that standard GP-prescribed exercise, usually gym sessions, don't work well for this group as they find them discouraging and lonely, with many dropping out very early on. The team's aim was to come up with a new type of exercise programme which would ensure that the women are supported and motivated for the duration of the treatment.

Around 40 women with depression in the Nottingham area took part in the research. It involved a pragmatic randomised trial of a standard 'exercise-as-usual' programme compared with the new, individually tailored and supported plan.

The key to the new programme is 'mentored' exercise, which includes group motivational support and a low effort walking plan. The women volunteers attended sessions at their local authority leisure centre three times a week for four weeks. In each session the women received a half hour motivational coaching session conducted by a health psychologist,

in a small friendly group, followed by an individually tailored exercise session on the [treadmill](#) in the gym, supervised by a sports therapist. The women exercised alongside each other, and additional emotional and social support was available to them for the duration of their session, though this was slowly decreased as confidence and the support from peers within the group increased.

Results of psychometric tests carried out on the women on the special programme proved they had experienced a significant improvement in their mood, [physical health](#), sense of wellbeing, self-esteem and quality of life. In focus group sessions the women said they felt they had achieved these gains via a positive, comfortable and unintimidating experience which encouraged regular and continued attendance.

One volunteer said: “I feel more confident in my physical self and my emotional self. I do think it has helped with my mood.”

Women who received an 'exercise as usual' programme experienced no significant benefits, were less likely to continue attending, and were markedly less enthusiastic. Lead researcher on the team, Professor Patrick Callaghan said: “[Exercise](#) tailored to preferred exertion levels, combined with support from others is a prescription designed to improve depressed women's overall health and well being.”

The women who participated in this study are those commonly seen in GP surgeries up and down the country. The researchers intend to make GPs and PCTs aware of the benefits of adding this to the range of services they make available to [women](#) living with depression through a process of educational outreach meetings in the coming months.

Provided by University of Nottingham ([news](#) : [web](#))

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