

Exercise alleviates sexual side-effects of antidepressants in women, study shows

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New psychology research, which could have important public health implications for alleviating some side effects of antidepressants, shows that engaging in exercise at the right time significantly improves sexual functioning in women who are taking the antidepressants.

The study, published online in *Depression and Anxiety*, shows that sexual dysfunction can be effectively treated with an inexpensive, non-invasive prescription of moderately intense workouts.

"These findings have important implications for [public health](#), as [exercise](#) as a treatment for sexual [side effects](#) is accessible, cheap and does not add to burden of care," says Tierney Lorenz, an Indiana University post-doctoral research fellow who conducted the study at The University of Texas at Austin with Psychology Professor Cindy Meston.

The researchers recruited 52 women who reported sexual side effects from antidepressants. During the first three weeks of the study, the participants engaged in [sexual activity](#) with no exercise. In the second experiment, the participants completed either three weeks of exercise immediately before sexual activity, or three weeks of exercise not timed to it. They all also engaged in sexual activity and 30 minutes of strength training and cardio exercise three times a week. The two groups then reversed roles in the last experiment. Women who exercised regularly were asked to add three extra sessions to their workout routines.

The results showed that 30 minutes of exercise just before intercourse

can reduce the effect of the libido-dulling drugs. They were based on the participants' self-reported assessments of their [sexual functioning](#), satisfaction and psychological health before and after each experiment. They also reported each sexual event in online diaries.

According to the findings, committing to a regular exercise routine improved orgasm function in all women. However, those who exercised immediately before sex experienced significantly stronger libidos and overall improvements in sexual functioning.

Moderately intense exercise activates the sympathetic nervous system, which facilitates blood flow to the genital region. Antidepressants have been shown to depress this system. Scheduling regular sexual activity and exercise may be an effective tool for alleviating these adverse side effects, Lorenz says.

"Considering the wide prevalence of antidepressant sexual side effects and the dearth of treatment options for those experiencing these distressing effects, this is an important step in treating [sexual dysfunction](#) among women who are taking antidepressants," Lorenz says.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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