

# Engaging in physical activity decreases people's chance of developing depression

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An international team including researchers from King's College London have found physical activity can protect against the emergence of depression, regardless of age and geographical region.

The researchers from Brazil, Belgium, Australia, USA, UK and Sweden pooled data from 49 unique cohort studies of people free from mental illness that examined if [physical activity](#) is associated with a decreased risk of developing [depression](#).

In total, 266,939 individuals were included, with a gender distribution of 47% males, and on average the individuals were followed up after 7.4 years.

Once the data were extracted they found that compared with people with low levels of physical activity, those with high levels had lower odds of developing depression in the future.

Furthermore, physical activity had a protective effect against the emergence of depression in youths, in adults, and in the elderly and across geographical regions, (in Europe, North America, and Oceania).

Lead author Professor Dr Felipe Barreto Schuch, Universidade La Salle (Brazil), said, 'This is the first global meta-analysis to establish that engaging in physical activity is beneficial for protecting the general population from developing depression.'

'The evidence is clear that people that are more active have a lesser risk of developing depression. We have looked at whether these effects happen at different age groups and across different continents and the results are clear. Regardless your age or where you live, physical activity can reduce the risk of having depression later in life.'

Co-author Dr Brendon Stubbs, Post-doctoral research physiotherapist, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London and Head of Physiotherapy, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, said,

'Our robust analysis of over a quarter of a million people found consistent evidence that people who are more active are less likely to develop depression in the future.

We found that higher levels of physical activity were protective from future depression in children, adults and older adults, across every continent and after taking into account other important factors such as body mass index, smoking and physical health conditions.

'Given the multitude of other health benefits of physical activity, our data add to the pressing calls to prioritise physical activity across the lifespan.'

Co-author Dr Simon Rosenbaum, Senior Research Fellow at UNSW Sydney and the Black Dog Institute, said, 'The challenge ahead is ensuring that this overwhelming evidence is translated into meaningful policy change that creates environments and opportunities to help everyone, including vulnerable members of our society, engage in physical activity'.

Co-author Dr Joseph Firth, Research Fellow at NICM Health Research Institute at Western Sydney University said, 'The compelling evidence presented here provides an even stronger case for engaging all people in [regular physical activity](#); through schools, workplaces, leisure programs and elsewhere, in order to reduce the risk of depression across the lifespan.'

Further studies are warranted to evaluate the minimum [physical activity levels](#) required and the effects of different types of activity and 'dosages' on subsequent risk for depression.

The findings have been published today in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

**More information:** *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2018). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2018.17111194](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2018.17111194)

Provided by King's College London

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