

Activity is good. Varied activity is better

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The recommendations are clear: physical activity is good for mental health. But it also depends on how varied it is. That's what a new study by researchers at the University of Basel shows, pointing to one of the reasons why well-being suffers during the pandemic.

A walk in the morning, a jog in the evening or even just going out to buy groceries: activity helps the psyche. Many are trying to stay active during the pandemic despite mandatory home office and limited leisure activities. Others find that they are moving significantly less than before the pandemic because previous everyday activities are off-limits due to measures taken against the spread of Covid-19.

Against this backdrop, a study led by Professor Andrew Gloster of the University of Basel provides an indication of what impact restricted [movement patterns](#) might have. The results have been published in the journal *BMC Psychiatry*.

That exercise promotes not only physical but also mental health is known from [various studies](#). However, these mostly focused on the influence of deliberate exercise programs. "In contrast, little was known about whether everyday, naturally chosen movement patterns also influence [mental health](#)," Gloster explains.

To investigate this, he and researchers at the University Psychiatric Clinics in Basel collected GPS data from 106 patients with mental disorders who agreed to participate. For this purpose, the study participants were given extra smartphones that they carried with them for a week. This allowed the researchers to track their movements without interfering with the patients' daily routine. The research team then compared the movement data with surveys of the participants' well-being and symptoms of their mental illness.

The results showed that the more people moved and the more varied their movements, the greater their sense of well-being. However, no influence on the symptoms could be determined. "Our results suggest that activity alone is not enough to reduce symptoms of [mental disorders](#), but can at least improve subjective well-being," Gloster elaborates.

"Although the data were collected before the pandemic, the results are also relevant in light of the limitations during the coronavirus crisis," he adds. Because many social and [recreational activities](#) were discontinued during that time, many people's [physical activity](#) patterns also likely became more monotonous. Various studies by research groups at the University of Basel have been able to show that the pandemic took a toll on the psyche of the population. The results of the team led by Gloster suggest that the restricted movement patterns could also play a role in this.

More information: Andrew T. Gloster et al, The spatiotemporal movement of patients in and out of a psychiatric hospital: an observational GPS study, *BMC Psychiatry* (2021). [DOI: 10.1186/s12888-021-03147-9](#)

Provided by University of Basel

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