

Low intensity exercise linked to reduced depression

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New research has found a significant association between participating in low to moderate intensity exercise and reduced rates of depression.

Researchers from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) carried out an umbrella review of studies carried out across the world to examine the potential of physical activity as a [mental health](#) intervention.

The analysis, [published](#) in the journal *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, found that physical activity reduced the risk of [depression](#) by 23% and anxiety by 26%.

A particularly strong association was found between low and [moderate physical activity](#), which included activities such as gardening, golf and walking, and reduced risk of depression. However, this was not strongly observed for high intensity exercise.

Physical activity was also significantly associated with reduced risk of severe mental health conditions, including a reduction in psychosis/schizophrenia by 27%.

The results were consistent in both men and women, and across different age groups and across the world.

Lead author Lee Smith, professor of public health at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said, "Preventing mental health complications effectively has emerged as a major challenge, and an area of paramount importance in the realm of public health. These conditions can be complex and necessitate a multi-pronged approach to treatment, which may encompass pharmacological interventions, psychotherapy, and [lifestyle changes](#)."

"These effects of physical activity intensity on depression highlight the need for precise exercise guidelines. Moderate exercise can improve mental health through biochemical reactions, whereas high-intensity exercise may worsen stress-related responses in some individuals."

"Acknowledging differences in people's response to exercise is vital for effective mental health strategies, suggesting any activity recommendations should be tailored for the individual.

"The fact that even low to moderate levels of physical activity can be beneficial for mental health is particularly important, given that these levels of activity may be more achievable for people who can make smaller lifestyle changes without feeling they need to commit to a high-[intensity exercise](#) program."

More information: Masoud Rahmati et al, Physical activity and prevention of mental health complications: An umbrella review, *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2024.105641](#)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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