

Exercise is Good for Heart and Soul

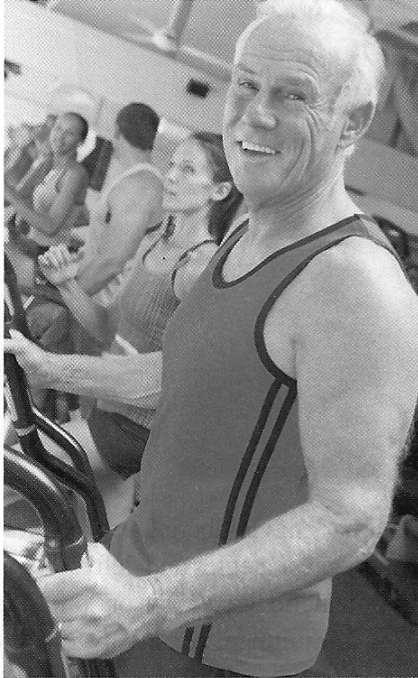
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The physical benefits of exercise have long been touted, but what about the emotional and psychological effects? Experts agree, and research data supports, that people who exercise regularly are less likely to have depression symptoms. Furthermore, those patients who are diagnosed with mild to moderate depression are being “prescribed” exercise is an effective treatment with impressive results.

This offers an important treatment alternative to patients who are reluctant to take medications for fear of side effects, or the perceived stigma associated with antidepressant drugs. What’s more, some brand new research questions the overall effectiveness of these medications.

In fact, new studies reveal that exercise reduced depression symptoms by 50% in individuals who participated in aerobic activities three to five times a week. “The effect you find when using aerobic exercise alone in treating clinical depression is similar to what you find with antidepressant medications,” said Dr Madhukar Trivedi, a professor of psychiatry and director of UT Southwestern’s mood disorders research program.

How is that possible? When the human body exercises, it releases chemicals called endorphins. These chemicals react with the receptors in the brain. This results in positive feelings (euphoria) and diminished perception of pain (analgesia). Addi-



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tionally, endorphins have a sedative, calming property.

Participation in a regular exercise program has also demonstrated improvements in the following areas: A boost in self esteem, confidence and positive mood; reduced anxiety and stress; improved sleep/wake patterns; increases appetite; strengthens cardiovascular and respiratory systems; and helps improve muscle tone and strength while also reducing body fat

Yet with all the benefits of exercise, it is interesting to note that according to The American Heart Association only approximately 32% of Americans report that they participate in regular exercise.

Whether you are currently a faithful exerciser (good for you!) or contemplating starting a new workout program, the key is to find something you *enjoy*. In addition, exercising with a partner or in a group also demonstrates much lower “drop-out” rates. Try to think outside the traditional “treadmill” or “aerobic class” box. Some examples of moderate exercise (at least three times a week) include: walking; dancing; biking; running (at a moderate pace); swimming; playing tennis; golfing (if walking and not using the cart); gardening and yard work; housework (especially sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, etc.); and yoga.

So, whether you are fighting depression, want a healthier body or want to improve your quality of life (or all three combined), it’s time to get moving!