

## **Ready, Set, Run! Combat Depression with Regular Exercise**

Imagine going to the doctor with symptoms of depression and she hands you a new prescription: Do two sets of squats, 15 bicep curls, 10 laps around the track and call me in the morning. Though this is not (yet) an accurate picture, experts are starting to recognize that regular exercise is not only good for your mood but may help combat depression, too.

Until physicians and other healthcare providers universally prescribe exercise as an alternative treatment for depression, it's best to turn to a group of professionals who are already in the know: physical therapists. PTs are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health illnesses like depression and understand how the disorder can interfere with a person's ability to enjoy life.

An individualized care plan starts with a thorough assessment and detailed patient history so the PT can capture the limitations of the illness and understand the goals the patient would like to achieve. Each custom treatment plan includes some combination of flexibility, strength, coordination and balance exercises designed to achieve optimal physical function and to help shed the layers of depression.

For patients suffering from depression, it can be stressful and overwhelming to think about incorporating exercise into their lives either for the first time or after a long hiatus. Because the illness' symptoms often include fatigue and loss of interest in activities, it can be difficult for patients to take that first step, both literally and figuratively. But physical therapists excel in motivating patients to perform exercises both safely and effectively. In fact, another bonus of seeing a physical therapist to get started on a new exercise program, is that he's trained to identify other injuries or illnesses that require a special approach.

You don't have to have depression to reap the benefits of exercise. In fact, the mood-boosting pastime can help anyone who might be temporarily sad or otherwise not themselves. Major life stressors—divorce, loss of a job, and death—are difficult for anyone and regular exercise is a great way to help people through a tough time.

With regular exercise, you're guaranteed to see improvements in the following areas:

- Strength and flexibility
- Sleep
- Memory
- Self-confidence
- Energy

- Mood

Even minimal changes in any of these areas could change your outlook on the day and your ability to participate in activities you once enjoyed. So, what are you waiting for?