



## David Fairlamb

# THE FIT FACTOR

### LIFESTYLE CHANGE

The benefits of exercise for better mental health are often underestimated and many people have no idea how good they could feel in a very short space of time.

### FITNESS TIP

Regular exercise at the right intensity can be an incredibly powerful tool to improve our mental health.

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**R**EGULAR exercise at the right intensity can be an incredibly powerful tool to improve our mental health. The benefits of exercise in this area are often underestimated and many people have little idea how good they could feel in a very short space of time.

#### **How does exercise help our mental health?**

Any form of exercise gives us structure, purpose, energy and motivation. It is also very effective in changing the way we process and react to emotions and helps build an emotional resilience to stress. This will in turn reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety, help change our behaviour, increase self-esteem, and reduce loneliness by becoming more sociable.

#### **Reduces the symptoms of depression**

Not only does depression make

you feel incredibly low during the period you have it, but it also affects your risk of developing chronic physical ill health, resulting in poor quality of life in the long run.

Drug choices are not always appropriate and less than half of patients taking anti-depressants have a meaningful clinical response. Exercise can be a valuable alternative approach.

Exercise has proven to be an effective way to prevent and alleviate both severe and mild symptoms of depression.

#### **Relieves anxiety**

Anxiety and depression are often experienced together, and exercise has been shown to be beneficial for anxiety as well. A meta-analysis of 13 separate studies showed many exercisers emphasized that they had better protection from the development of anxiety symptoms than those who did not.

#### **Improved behaviour**

Exercise in children improves their behaviour. The researchers reported they work better, are less aggressive and take more responsibility for their behaviour, especially those with disorders such as ADHD.

#### **Less loneliness**

Fighting loneliness is tough and we all need a sense of belonging and connection with those around us. Exercise gives us motivation and enthusiasm to make positive changes in order to feel motivated and enthusiastic, along with a sense of purpose and structure.

When you are more active and engaged with others, your quality of life improves along with life satisfaction.

#### **Increased self-esteem**

Self-esteem is found to be higher in those who exercise regularly alongside better cardiovascular health, and a more positive self-awareness.

High self-esteem improves our overall mental health by creating more positive self-awareness,



increased self-confidence, and improved body and self-image.

#### **How much exercise do you need to do?**

The amount of exercise required to enjoy the benefits of mental health is probably less than you think - 150 minutes a week, eg. five

30-minute sessions, but some studies have shown some longer sessions have a greater impact. Also try to mix it up with different activities.

The effects can be rapid and big positive changes can be made after only a few weeks, but you must continue to ensure long-term consistency.

*Exercise is not only key to physical health but also peace of mind*

**Motivational quote of the day**